

Revised December 2015

# Behavior-Focused IEP's:

*How Parents Can Help  
the IEP Team*



*Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities*

The Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities (OCECD) is a statewide, nonprofit organization that serves families of infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities in Ohio, and agencies who provide services to them. OCECD works through the coalition efforts of more than 35 parent and professional disability organizations which comprise the Coalition.

Established in 1972 and staffed primarily by parents of children and adults with disabilities, persons with disabilities, and education professionals, the Coalition's mission is to ensure that every Ohio child with special needs receives a free, appropriate, public education in the least restrictive environment to enable that child to reach his/her highest potential. Throughout Ohio, the Coalition's services reach families of children and youth, birth through twenty-six, with all disabilities.

OCECD's programs help parents become informed and effective representatives for their children in all educational settings. In addition, youth are assisted to advocate for themselves. Through knowledge about laws, resources, rights and responsibilities, families are better able to work with agencies to ensure that appropriate services are received for the benefit of their sons and daughters.



**OHIO COALITION FOR THE EDUCATION OF  
CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

**165 WEST CENTER STREET, SUITE 302  
MARION, OHIO 43302-3741  
(740) 382-5452 • (844) 382-5452 (Toll Free)  
(740) 383-6421 (Fax) • [www.ocecd.org](http://www.ocecd.org)**



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# **Behavior-Focused IEP's: *How Parents Can Help the IEP Team***

## ***Introduction***

**It's called challenging behavior because it challenges the typical methods of parental discipline and educational intervention.**

Through educational research over the last decade, effective practices have been identified for dealing with difficult and challenging behavior in schools. Still, in too many cases, the results of this research and the practices it suggests have not reached educators at the district or building level. According to Dr. George Sugai, Co-Director of the Center on Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, University of Oregon, it's not that we don't know what's effective, it's that we don't know how to apply what's effective to the context (of schools).

The purpose of this booklet is to offer parents guidance for their participation in the IEP process. It provides basic information about the foundation for the development of behavior plans and the provision of special education services. In addition, it offers suggestions for participating in IEP meetings to facilitate effective planning for educational services to students with disabilities who have difficult behavior.

This booklet will:

- Give parents information about IDEA 2004 concepts that will help them protect their child's right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE),
- Give parents knowledge required to develop effective IEPs for students with challenging behavior, and
- Provide an overview of current research on effective practices for addressing challenging behavior in the school setting.

Parents often find IEP meetings difficult because they are the outsiders at the educator's meeting-room table. Because their needs are not easily met, IEP meetings for students with challenging behavior can be particularly difficult, pitting parents against professionals. In their frustration, educators can blame parents for their inability to control their child's behavior and question their parenting skills. Parents can blame educators for their lack of expertise. Some may accuse educators of making their child a scapegoat because of their reputation.

IDEA 2004 directs school personnel to deal with challenging behavior through the IEP process. It encourages the use of positive behavior interventions, strategies and supports to address problem behavior. The problem is that school personnel do not have a clear understanding of positive behavior support and how to implement it in the school setting.

The participation of parents in IEP meetings for their children is critical. As a parent advocate, I've sat at the IEP table with many parents who brought the powerful weight of love, commitment and tolerance to a team of educators that was hard-pressed to support and educate a student with very difficult behavior. Parents face a particular challenge in carrying out their responsibility to ensure that their child with difficult and challenging behavior receives a free and appropriate public education. I hope this booklet can help.

Donna M. Owens, M. Ed.  
DMO Program Services  
Columbus, Ohio



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# 1 Know Basic IDEA 2004 Concepts



***IDEA 2004 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act) ensures all children with disabilities and their families access to a free and appropriate public education. It outlines the procedures and services required by state school systems and local school districts in providing educational services for students with disabilities. The law gives specific***

***direction to educators regarding issues of behavior and discipline for students with disabilities. Knowing the basics, both in the general intent of the law and the specifics in regard to behavior issues, will help parents ensure their child's right to appropriate educational services.***



## **Parent Participation**

Parent participation is emphasized by IDEA 2004. Parents are included as decision-making members of the team that develops their child's educational program. Annual meetings are required and additional meetings are encouraged when there are questions or concerns. An entire section of the law is devoted to procedural safeguards that identify

parents' rights to participate in and to be informed about educational decisions. IDEA 2004 also grants parents the right to question the team's educational decisions with a formal hearing process.

## **Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**

IDEA 2004 requires that each child with a disability be provided FAPE. This is accomplished through the implementation of an individualized plan developed by parents and school personnel. This plan guides the provision of supplementary aids, services, and supports to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

The educational plan must meet the child's needs that result from the disability and any other educational needs. The services a school district provides are not decided on the basis of a child's category of disability. IDEA 2004 provides that the services and placement needed by each child with a disability to receive a FAPE must be based on the child's unique need and not on the child's disability.

**Your child's program must be designed to fit your child's needs.**

### **Points to Remember From IDEA 2004**

#### **Consideration of Special Factors**

Challenging behavior is one of several conditions that IDEA 2004 identifies as so fundamental to a child's education that the IEP team is directed to address them specifically. According to IDEA 2004, the IEP team must address behavior issues when a child's behavior interferes with his or her learning OR when the child's behavior interferes with the learning of others. Furthermore, in addressing behavioral needs the IEP team is directed to consider (when appropriate) strategies, including positive behavioral interventions, strategies and supports.

**Challenging behavior is a fundamental educational concern.**

#### **Services and Supports to be Provided**

It is important for parents to know that IDEA 2004 provides information regarding the services and supports that must be identified on the IEP.

- ◆ Supplementary aids and services means aids, services, and other supports that are provided in regular education classes, other education-related settings, and in extracurricular and nonacademic settings, to enable children with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent appropriate.

These supports refer to services for the child, such as tutoring, specialized reading or math programming, social skills training, and anger management training. These supports would also include related services such as specialized transportation services and occupational or speech therapy. It further requires:

- ◆ Specially designed instruction adapting as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child, the content, methodology, or delivery of content to address the unique needs of a child.

**The IEP can include supports needed for school personnel as well as services for the child.**

Teams rarely think in terms of program modifications for students with challenging behavior. These must be considered, however, in a thorough IEP. Examples of program modifications could include de-escalation periods as a part of regular class participation or shortened class periods.

In addition, the IEP team can consider supports that will be necessary for school personnel to address the behavioral needs effectively. Does the instructor need increased staff support? Is additional planning time necessary for the team? Does the team need specific training to supplement their knowledge and skills in addressing difficult behavior?

### **Purpose of Services Provided**

As it is for all students with disabilities, the purpose of the services and supports identified on the IEP is stated clearly in IDEA 2004. Services are provided in order for the child:

- ◆ To advance toward achieving annual goals,
- ◆ To progress in the regular curriculum,
- ◆ To participate in extracurricular activities, and
- ◆ To be educated with other children, both children with and without disabilities.

**Services should help your child achieve IEP goals and participate in extra curricular activities.**

### **Progress Monitoring**

In the case of the student with challenging behavior, parents should be able to monitor their child's progress in meeting behavioral goals and academic goals through progress reports that occur as regularly as report cards are issued. Further, parents should be able to understand how behavioral goals are evaluated and

**You should know if your child's program is sufficient for your child to meet annual behavioral and other educational goals.**



**If the model for developing power resides in the powerful**

**that is, if what we learn  
about how to behave  
is by observing those who  
have power over us-**

**then those in power must  
assume responsibility  
for modeling appropriate behaviors**

what documentation will be kept to support the evaluation. These progress reports should indicate whether current progress will allow the child to meet identified annual goals.

## 2 Know the Fundamentals of Positive Behavior Support



### From Punishment to Prevention

When IDEA 2004 suggests the use of *positive behavior interventions, strategies and supports*, it requires us to make a basic shift in thinking about how we will address challenging behavior. This change requires us to begin thinking about prevention through instruction and support for appropriate behavior as the focus of all behavior change programs. With this shift in thinking we stop trying to identify the right consequences and start identifying what new skills can be taught and what supports can be added to make the behavior less likely to occur.

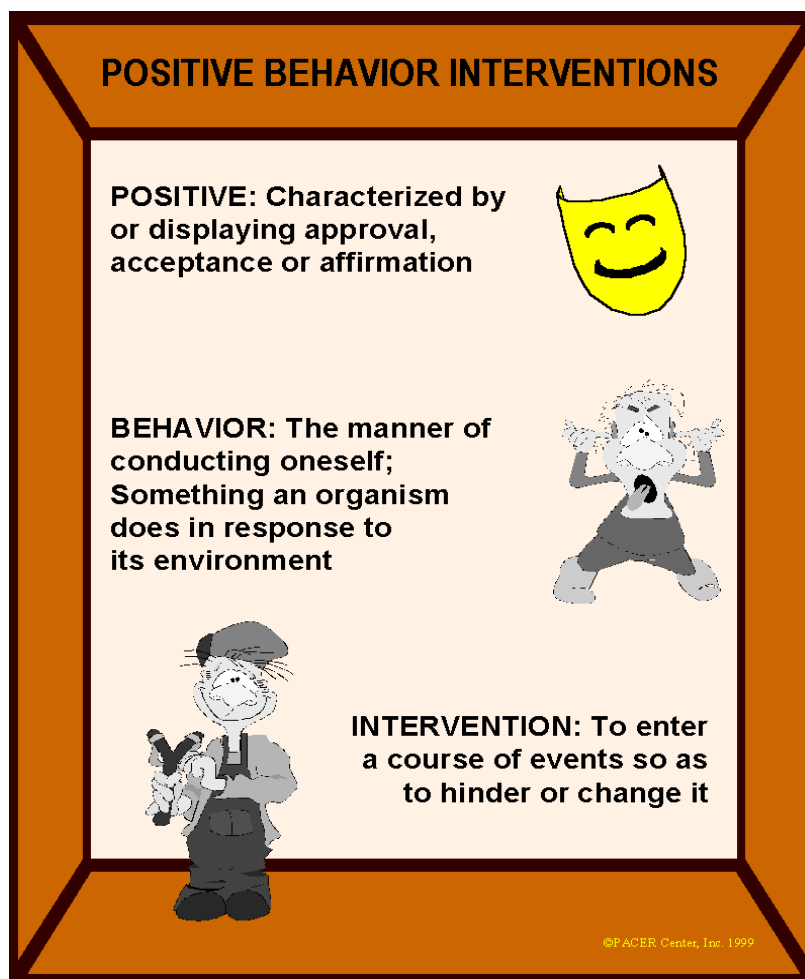
This shift in thinking is the basis of Positive Behavior Support. It will make a crucial difference in how your child's IEP team approaches the development of the behavior plan and the development of the IEP. While Positive Behavior support is a reflection of the results of the most recent research in addressing challenging behavior, it is not customary thinking for educators or for most parents. Parents must make this shift in thinking themselves to be effective in supporting the educational planning for their children who present challenging behavior.

This shift in thinking will be reflected in the following ways during your child's IEP meeting.

1. The team will identify the problem behavior(s) and engage in a discussion to identify the purpose of the behavior(s). This discussion will be based on a review of your child's school records and observations of your child's behavior across a variety of settings, including your own observations. The team will identify factors that appear to influence the behavior and ultimately arrive at a conclusion about the purpose of the behavior. This investigative process is called the Functional Behavior Assessment. (See Section 3).
2. The team will develop a Positive Behavior Support plan that is based on the information discussed. The plan will include strategies to change the influences on the behavior by changing the settings, adding supports in settings where the behavior is likely to occur, identifying both academic and social skills to be taught, and by identifying ways to reinforce the new skills. While the plan will emphasize prevention, it will also include direction in how to respond to the problem behavior when it occurs. The plan may also include identified meeting time for team members to access training, review information, and make adaptations to the plan.

The plan developed may be incorporated into your child's IEP by including new skills to be taught and behavior goals as annual goals and short-term objectives, with accommodations and supports to be provided listed in the services section of the IEP. If the Positive Behavior Support plan is lengthy, it may also be a separate document incorporated as part of the IEP by a reference to it in the services section of the IEP. This separate document is generally necessary when the plan is lengthy and incorporates an identified crisis intervention plan.

3. The team will develop a monitoring system to track the plan's effectiveness. This monitoring system will track the occurrences of the problem behavior, but will also track the student's use of replacement behaviors as a way to determine the effectiveness of the plan. A regular system of communication will be arranged between you and a team representative to maintain your understanding of and involvement in the plan.



### 3 Understand the Functional Behavior Assessment Process

If the shift in thinking from punishment to prevention is the foundation of Positive Behavior Support, then the Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) is the foundation of the Positive Behavior Support plan. The FBA is comprised of a description of the behavior and an analysis of all the influences upon it. The FBA considers the behavior within the environment where it occurs and within the context of the child's life. It provides the information necessary to develop a Positive Behavior Support plan.

**The Functional Behavior Assessment is the foundation of the Positive Behavior Support Plan.**

In adults or children, in school or at home, all behavior has a purpose; it serves a need we experience. The need a behavior fulfills for an individual is called its *function*. The FBA assumes that the key to altering a problem behavior is identifying the need the behavior serves and then in helping the individual meet that need in another, more appropriate, way.



#### Topography and Function

In order to understand the function of a behavior we must understand the difference between the topography of a behavior and the function of the behavior. The topography of a behavior refers to how the behavior looks—for example, a student in Ms. Myers 6<sup>th</sup> grade class throws the reading book on the floor when asked to read a passage aloud. Throwing the book on the floor is the topography of the behavior—it describes what the student does.

We can't judge a behavior by its appearance. Just as a fever is the symptom of a number of illnesses, a particular behavior can serve a number of different functions—for different individuals and for the same individual at different times.

The function of the behavior is concerned with why the student throws the book on the floor—something we can not determine without further investigation. We must consider the *particular* behavior of a *particular* student in a *particular* set of circumstances. The FBA process requires the IEP team to take a thorough look at the student and the relationship of the student's behavior to the environment in which it occurs.



# Functional Behavior Assessment

A functional assessment looks at **why** a child behaves as he or she does given:

- ✓ the nature of the child, and
- ✓ what is happening in the environment
  
- ✓ Functional behavioral assessment:
  - ✓ guides decision-making about needs
  - ✓ leads to strategies to help meet the need
  - ✓ is required when a child is to be removed from his or her educational program beyond 10 days
  - ✓ should be considered in any evaluation when behavioral concerns have not responded to standard interventions



### **Problem Behaviors are Context Related**

A fundamental assumption about behaviors that can be made is that most problem behaviors are *context related*. Behaviors arise in response to environmental stimuli (peers, class size, curricula, etc.), given personality and temperament, and internal factors (emotional distress, mental illness, medication, anxiety, hunger, pain, allergies, or physical illness). Behaviors can be supported or made worse by events in the child's environment, such as who is

present, what the expectations are, or even whether the child is emotionally equipped to adapt to the requirements of the particular environment in which the behavior occurs.

An anxious child who has been placed in an open classroom for the first time, for instance, may emotionally withdraw to escape the demands of the environment. Shape the classroom to reduce the noise level and other distractions, and the child may not have the same behaviors, or they may not be as severe. A student who is known to have a major behavior outburst only when a substitute teacher is present is clearly responding to a variable in the environment. Knowing this information in advance can help the teacher plan more effectively in instances such as where a substitute teacher is needed.

### **Problem Behaviors Serve a Function**

A second assumption about problem behavior is that it serves a function for a student. If a student has severe behavior problems when a substitute teacher is in the room, one cannot simply make an assumption that the student is bored or wants to show off for friends. Other possibilities are that the student likes the regular teacher and is angry when she is not there, or is anxious about what to expect with a new teacher. If the student misbehaves and is ordered to take a time-out by the substitute teacher, and the room is more chaotic in general with a substitute, time-out may be viewed as a preferred activity. Thus, the acting-out behavior may represent the student's efforts to be placed in an environment that is more appropriate to his or her needs.

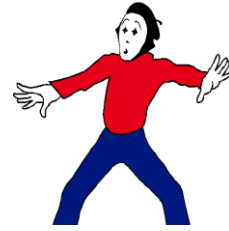


The use of consequences that improve the behaviors of most students may be insufficient for some. Consequences that do not address the function of particular behaviors are not an adequate response for children with complex behaviors. It is important to understand that the problem behavior (what the child does) and the function of the behavior (why he or she does it) may be unrelated.

For instance, skipping school or getting good grades are two very different behaviors that may serve the same function – getting adult attention.

### **Problem Behaviors Have Multiple Causes**

Problem behaviors are often complex and reinforced in multiple ways. They frequently interfere with the opportunity for a student to benefit from the educational experience, and may not respond to standard classroom behavior management strategies or reinforcements (such as teacher praise).



A functional assessment, properly conducted, will provide information to parents and teachers to come up with a "best guess" about why a specific behavior is occurring so that an intervention can be developed that teaches the child more acceptable ways to get his or her needs met.

### **Gathering Information**

There are two steps in conducting the FBA. The first step is gathering information. The second step is analyzing the information. The first step is more involved than just gathering information that describes the incident. Information can be gathered by:

- ◆ Direct observation,
- ◆ Review of medical and school records,
- ◆ Conducting achievement and educational testing,
- ◆ Conducting behavioral and social skills assessments, and
- ◆ Interviews with parents and others who have knowledge of the student.

A valid FBA addresses much more than school performance. It considers the behavior in the context of the student's life at school and at home. An FBA includes information about the student's:

- ◆ Health and medical issues,
- ◆ Strengths,
- ◆ Challenges,
- ◆ Likes and dislikes,
- ◆ Home environment,
- ◆ Relationships,
- ◆ Social skills,
- ◆ School performance, and
- ◆ Cognitive ability.

The greater the concern about the behavior (and the greater impediment a student's behavior is to his or her own learning or the learning of others), the more data-gathering, planning and analysis will be required to develop an effective behavior support plan.

# Functional Assessment of Behavior

What is the behavior of concern?

Where does the behavior occur and not occur?

What are the antecedents to the behavior? (what happens beforehand)?

Is there a consistent pattern? Can the behavior be predicted?

What does the student "get" from using the behavior? (reinforcer)

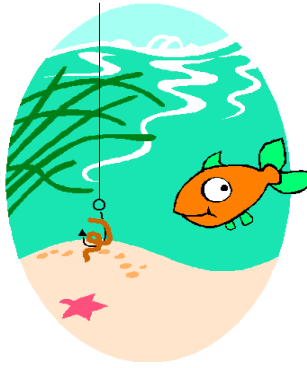
What are some possible reasons for the behavior? (hypotheses)

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What replacement behaviors can be taught that serve the same function?

**A**

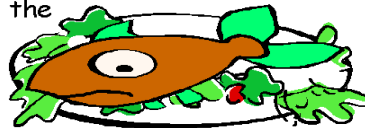
**Antecedent**  
event, cause  
or condition  
that influences  
behavior

**B**

**Behavior**  
what one does

**C**

**Consequence**  
what happens as a  
result of the  
behavior



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### Summary Statement

An FBA concludes with a summary statement. After analyzing the information gathered, a summary statement is developed that identifies:

- ◆ A Predictor (the antecedents for the behavior)
- ◆ The Behavior (the description of the behavior)
- ◆ The Function (the identification of the need the behavior serves)

The Summary Statement is a team's hypothesis, or best guess, about the need the child is trying to meet through the behavior. In some cases teams will plan to manipulate certain conditions to test the hypothesis. For example, if the team believes the function of a behavior is gaining the attention of the teacher, the teacher will purposely give the child attention in the situations when the behavior is likely to occur. If the incidence of the behavior decreases, the hypothesis about the need the behavior serves is confirmed.

**A predictor:** *When Jerry is asked to read a section in the science book and answer questions in writing.*

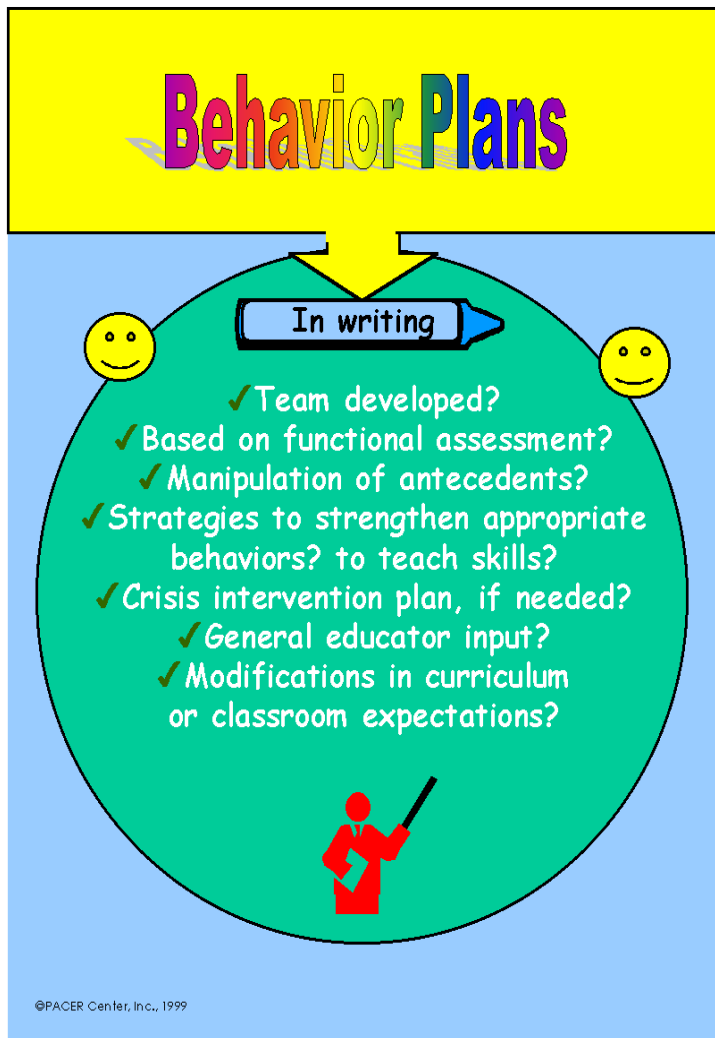
**The behavior:** *He ignores the assignment, talks to other students and becomes angry and belligerent when he is instructed to begin.*

**The function:** *To escape the assignment because the reading material is beyond his level of reading comprehension.*

## Developing the Positive Behavior Intervention Plan

The Positive Behavior Intervention plan uses the information from the FBA to develop a plan that:

- ◆ Minimizes the influences that precipitate the behavior,
- ◆ Provides instruction in appropriate behaviors to replace the problem behavior,
- ◆ Identifies ways to reinforce the new behaviors,
- ◆ Identifies accommodations and supports to promote the student's success in academic and social areas,
- ◆ Teaches new academic skills to support the student's ability to meet demands,
- ◆ Teaches social and problem solving skills, and
- ◆ Addresses any medical needs, either physical or emotional.



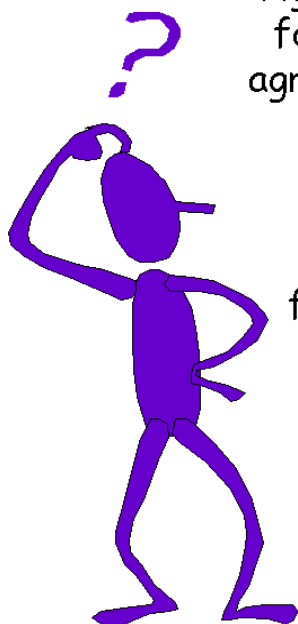
### General Interventions

- ◆ Make changes in the environment to meet individual needs (seating, room arrangements, traffic patterns)
- ◆ Provide opportunities for a child to make choices
- ◆ Make adaptations or accommodations in the curriculum
- ◆ Reinforce positive behaviors
- ◆ Teach appropriate replacement behaviors or skills
- ◆ Develop (if needed) crisis intervention plan

When the team has completed an FBA related to your child's problem behavior, the team will be able to identify appropriate supports and accommodations to minimize the need for the behavior.

## Question to Consider:

**"Can my child follow the school district and building discipline policy?"**



Agreeing that a child is able to follow the discipline policies is agreeing that the consequences are appropriate.

This determination must be **based on data**. If a child is frequently disciplined for not following the district policy, the team should consider whether the consequences are appropriate. If necessary, the IEP team can modify the policy.

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The IEP team is responsible for determining whether exceptions need to be made to the written school district discipline policy for a student, or whether the student needs a different consequence for misbehaviors than is written into the school discipline policy. This determination should be based on evaluation and a review of the records, including disciplinary records or manifestation determination review(s) that have been completed by the school.

A second stop in this deliberation is to determine what instructional goals need to be written into the IEP to help remediate the problems a child is having in following school discipline policies. A child's IEP should always be focused on teaching social responsibility so that he/she, over time and to the extent possible, develops the skills to meet adult expectations for behavioral self-management including, where possible, following the school discipline policies.

Special education services for a child must be based on data, not simply opinion. Evaluation data establishes the basis for providing, increasing, decreasing, or discontinuing special education services. Evaluation data is also used to determine a child's placement and the behavioral goals and objectives or benchmarks that form the basis for instruction.

When repeated punishment is used unsuccessfully to correct an inappropriate behavior or pattern of behavior, data should indicate that the consequence is not instructive to the child. In this instance, the IEP team should meet to develop a more effective intervention to address the behavior. Evidence will often support that some interventions, such as suspension, actually may be a desired outcome for some behaviors. When this is true, it is difficult to consider suspension as an effective intervention for problem behavior.

One of the most useful questions parents can ask when they have concern about what school staff are recommending for their child is "where's the data?" Special education decision-making is based on data, meaning that program recommendations, proposals to increase or decrease services, or for specific disciplinary interventions should be supported by evaluation data.

### **Zero Reject**

Schools do not serve only children who want to learn, are ready to learn, or who fit in available school district programs. IDEA 2004 mandates a zero reject policy in regard to the provision of educational services. It assumes that all children, no matter what their disability, can benefit from an educational program that is constructed to meet their specific needs. All students, even students who present problem behaviors that are difficult to contain and resistant to change have a right to an educational program that addresses their unique needs.



**Should we have them?  
Are they legal?**

## 4 Know the Current Research

Over the last decade researchers reviewed numerous programs to identify strategies that are effective in reducing challenging behavior in schools. The programs that were most effective shared these common elements:

- ◆ Social skills instruction training
- ◆ Planned behavior support
- ◆ Adaptations to instruction and curriculum
- ◆ Targeted behavior interventions for students who require them

Through this work researchers have also identified the characteristics of Positive Behavior Support plans. These plans share the following characteristics:

- ◆ They replace problem behavior with appropriate behaviors that serve the same function.
- ◆ They increase rates of existing appropriate behaviors.
- ◆ They provide supports necessary for the student to use the appropriate behavior, and
- ◆ They make changes to the environment to prevent the behavior.

### **According to the Research, Positive Behavior Support Plans:**

**Focus on Prevention.** Addressing challenging behavior has evolved from the rewards and penalties approach that most of us consider behavior management. Proactive behavior plans focus on prevention more than penalties. Effective plans view the challenging behavior in a global way addressing the influences on the behavior to promote change. These plans incorporate accommodations, support and skill-building.

**Teach Replacement Behaviors.** Through the FBA process, the team identifies appropriate behaviors that the student already exhibits and identifies ways these behaviors can be reinforced. The FBA identifies replacement behaviors that the student needs to be taught and develops a plan for teaching the new behaviors. Further the plan identifies strategies for reinforcing the student for using the new behaviors.

**Make Environmental Changes.** Successful behavior planning involves changes to the environment that will help the student be successful. A setting may need to be changed or a schedule change may be needed. For example: if a student is placed in a demanding class at the end of the day, a schedule change may be needed. Even the amount of time a student stays in a particular classroom may need to be adjusted to fit with the student's ability to maintain appropriate classroom behavior. All elements contributing to the behavior are considered open to change.

**Use Academic Adaptations.** Adjustments in the academic aspects of a student's program must be considered to promote the student's success. It is common for students with challenging behavior to fall behind academically. Expecting a student to perform at a level beyond the student's capacity causes frustration and invites noncompliance and escape behaviors. Academic adaptation can be considered in the following aspects of the student's program:

- ◆ Curriculum--what is presented, the content
- ◆ Instruction--how it's presented, the methods used to teach
- ◆ Expectations--tasks the student is expected to complete
- ◆ Conditions--the resources and supports provided (time, tutoring, peer support, notes and aids, etc.)

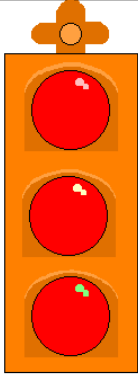
The point of academic accommodation is to help the student be successful. There are a number of ways that the conditions can be adapted to promote a student's success.

- ◆ **Size** Adapt the number of items that the learner is expected to learn or complete. For example: Reduce the number of social studies terms a learner must learn at any one time.
- ◆ **Time** Adapt the time allotted and allowed for learning, task completion, or testing. For example: Individualize a timeline for completing a task; pace learning differently (increase or decrease) for some learners.
- ◆ **Level of Support** Increase the amount of personal assistance with a specific learner. For example: Assign peer buddies, teaching assistants, peer tutors, or cross-age tutors.
- ◆ **Input** Adapt the way instruction is delivered to the learner. For example: Use different visual aids, plan more concrete examples, provide hands-on activities, place students in cooperative groups.
- ◆ **Difficulty** Adapt the skill level, problem type, or the rules on how the learner may approach the work. For example: Allow the use of a calculator to figure math problem; simplify task directions; change rules to accommodate learner needs.
- ◆ **Output** Adapt how the student can respond to instruction. For example: Instead of answering questions in writing, allow a verbal response, use a communication book for some students, allow students to show knowledge with hands-on materials.

## Planned Behavior Support

Most often, behavior is instinctive; it is what we do naturally. Learning to behave in a new way takes practice, just as learning to ride a bicycle takes practice. The more we do it successfully, the more instinctive and natural it becomes.


Successful programs must identify ways to support students in using replacement behaviors. For example, if a student is prone to get into fights at the change of classes, a plan would have to address the student's need for support during class changes to guide the student in using the appropriate behavior, and provide reinforcement when the appropriate behavior is used.



**Positive instruction**

**Stop!!!**

**relax**



**Think!!**


What is the problem?  
What do I (really) want?  
How many solutions can I find?  
What is the possible result of each solution?  
What is the best solution for me?

Try out the solution.  
Evaluate its effectiveness.

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The strategy of Stop, Relax, and Think is a problem-solving technique that can be incorporated into a behavior intervention plan. Some youth have to be systematically taught how to "stop" what they are doing so they can proceed to the next stop, or need visual reminders, such as a stop sign, to help them learn or remember to stop what they are doing when requested. Others may have to learn relaxation techniques – how it feels to relax, what visual image is relaxing, what sound is relaxing, etc., or specific techniques, such as unclenching one's hands and dropping the shoulders that makes physical relaxation easier.

Once a youth has agreed on a specific relaxation technique, the teacher can remind the student when he or she needs to relax. Once a student has mastered relaxation, they can begin to think of a plan to address the problem they are having, using the steps outlined below.



**Stop!!!**  
**relax**  
**Think!!**

**Possible instructional needs for a behavior intervention plan:**

- **Identify relaxation techniques.**
- **Identify steps to solve problems.**
- **Recognize who "owns" the problem.**
- **Role play problem-solving.**
- **Practice problem-solving skills.**

**What is the problem?**  
**What do I (really) want?**  
**How many solutions can I find?**  
**What is the possible result of each solution?**  
**What is the best one for me?**

**Try it out.**  
**Evaluate its effectiveness.**

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The Stop, Relax, and Think Strategy can be incorporated into a behavior intervention plan that teaches the steps. The red text above indicates specific areas of instructional need for some students that can include relaxation, role play, practice, and implementation of the plan developed by a student to resolve a problem.

## 5 Make A Written List Of Your Child's Characteristics

Many times when dealing with children with difficult behavior, IEP teams are unwilling to do the analysis that is required to develop individualized educational plans. Instead, they offer a menu of common options and familiar strategies that may or may not meet your child's needs (for example, lunch detention is proposed as the consequence for students who do not follow the rules in the cafeteria, etc.). IEP's for students with behavioral disabilities must be individualized programs that focus on the unique characteristics of each student and address the impact of those characteristics on that student's educational progress.

**IEP's for students must be individualized programs that focus on the unique characteristics of each student.**

There are two ways you can gather information about your child's characteristics to take to the IEP Team meeting.

**Your knowledge of your child.** You know from your experience with your child the characteristics that are challenging to you and others. You know the problem behaviors that have been described in previous meetings about your child. These are the behaviors that are interfering with your child's educational program.

For example:

- ◆ He doesn't listen to directions,
- ◆ She doesn't focus on her work,
- ◆ He refuses to do seatwork,
- ◆ She won't stay in her seat,
- ◆ He teases other students,
- ◆ She talks out in class and doesn't stop when asked, or
- ◆ He hits, teases, and fights with other students.



These characteristics/behaviors are the behaviors that must be considered in planning an effective educational program. Any educational program that does not identify specific strategies to prevent and/or discourage these behaviors will not be successful.

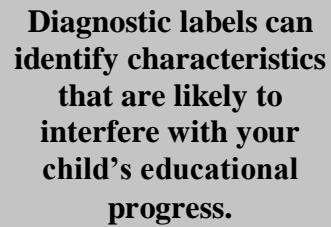
**Descriptions of your child's diagnosis.** You can also gather information about your child's unique characteristics by talking with your child's mental health professional or school psychologist. If your child has a diagnosis, that diagnosis refers to a particular set of characteristics. Mental health diagnoses common for children are determined, not through confirmation by blood tests or x-rays, or by other medical tests; they are determined by comparing evidence of your child's behavior to the particular characteristics of a particular diagnosis. These characteristics are listed in a professional

reference manual referred to as the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual, Fourth Edition, which is published by the American Psychiatric Association (DSM IV). Your child will not exhibit all the characteristics listed for a particular diagnosis, but will exhibit some. Knowing which characteristics your child manifests can guide the team's discussion about preventive strategies and appropriate accommodations.

While a child's diagnostic label cannot be used solely to plan an effective program, it can provide crucial information for the team in planning effective behavioral strategies.

Some common diagnoses for children with challenging behavior as identified by the DSM IV are:

- ◆ Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
- ◆ Conduct Disorder
- ◆ Oppositional-Defiant Disorder
- ◆ Tourette's Syndrome
- ◆ Autism Spectrum Disorder--Asperger's, Tourette's, Pervasive
- ◆ Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)



**Diagnostic labels can identify characteristics that are likely to interfere with your child's educational progress.**

Some students may have a cluster of these conditions. Other students who have challenging behavior may not have been identified with a mental health diagnosis, but may have been identified according to IDEA 2004 disability categories. For example, a child identified as having a learning disability does not have a mental health diagnosis, but a learning disability is a condition that has an agreed upon set of characteristics upon which the label is assigned. You can discuss these characteristics with your school psychologist.

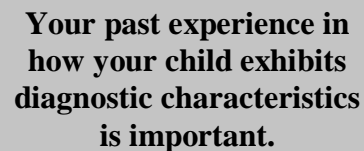
### **How the Characteristics Apply to Your Child**

How your child exhibits these characteristics must guide the IEP team in identifying what interventions, supports and instruction will be necessary to make your child's program effective. For example:

Children with AD/HD can present a range of behavioral characteristics that are likely to interfere with their educational progress—they can be fidgety, easily distracted, and disorganized. Each of these characteristics should be considered in terms of necessary accommodations while planning the educational program.

The plan could include the following accommodations:

- ◆ Break quiet seatwork assignments into 15 minute intervals,
- ◆ Teach coping strategies--taking a break after 15 minutes,



**Your past experience in how your child exhibits diagnostic characteristics is important.**

- ◆ Provide daily support for organizing books, materials and assignments,
- ◆ Assign special seating away from distractions,
- ◆ Teach self monitoring strategies,
- ◆ Plan time to review the monitoring results with the student, and
- ◆ Provide reinforcement for improvement.

In one classroom a student with AD/HD was accommodated by having two desks in the classroom to allow for the student's need to move; in another classroom a student with AD/HD was given a seat pillow to permit movement.

Not all children with AD/HD will have this set of characteristics, and some children will have these and others. How each child manifests any particular diagnosis will differ. Experience, school records and diagnostic characteristics will give a good indication of the kinds of behaviors that the IEP team must consider. It is the IEP team's task to determine how your child's unique needs will be addressed.

**IEP teams must determine how characteristics that are likely to interfere with your child's progress will be addressed.**



### **Take the List to the IEP Meeting**

Diagnostic labels provide a set of common characteristics manifested in children with particular disorders and disabilities. Be knowledgeable about the common characteristics of your child's condition and to what extent your child exhibits those characteristics. Take a written list of your child's characteristics to the IEP meeting. Share the list with the team as a way to ensure consideration of these characteristics in program planning.

These are questions to guide the team's thinking:

- ◆ How will each characteristic be likely to interfere with learning in the classroom?
- ◆ In what situations will this characteristic be a problem (during class discussion, during lectures, during individual seatwork, during group activities, during transition times)?
- ◆ What instructional strategies will decrease the impact of this characteristic?
- ◆ What direct instruction may be helpful in reducing the impact of this characteristic?
- ◆ What compensatory strategies might be taught to enable the child to deal with this characteristic?
- ◆ What supports and/or adaptations will be necessary to help reduce the impact of this characteristic?



## 6 Request and Expect Accommodation

Students with behavioral disabilities require accommodation. Just as a child in a wheelchair requires physical adaptations to the environment, children with behavioral disabilities can require accommodation in three areas:

- ◆ The physical environment
- ◆ The area of academics and instruction
- ◆ The social environment

### Physical Environment

All accommodations must be individually identified. Physical accommodations can include a designated area outside the classroom for students who have difficulty controlling their anger or seating away from the distraction of doors and windows.

### Academic Accommodations

Academic accommodations may include modified materials and/or assignments, increased time for task completion, and individual tutoring and other supports. Expect the IEP team to be familiar with your child's level of achievement and how it corresponds to academic expectations. Because challenging behavior interferes with learning, students with problem behavior will commonly require some adaptation to instruction. The frustration of not being able to do what is expected will only add to a child's vulnerability.



Teachers may need to use a variety of instructional strategies. Remember, the point is to help the child assimilate the concepts and information presented. The way to do that is a matter of choice—or choices. All educators know the importance of multiple instructional strategies.

### Social Accommodations

Social accommodations address the way we interact with students. This is one of the most difficult accommodations educators have to make. Often social accommodations are not responses educators want to make, or think they should make. They take pride in the fact that they treat all students the same. These educators hold a set of expectations for students that are inviolate. Remember, it is called challenging behavior because it challenges us, our rules, our institutions, our beliefs.

## The Therapeutic Response

A therapeutic response is one that is chosen for the long term positive impact it will have on the student. The word therapeutic is defined as "Having healing or curative powers; gradually or methodically ameliorative." (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, p. 1335). Therapeutic responses in interactions with students can be considered social accommodations.

Often educators don't know how to formulate therapeutic responses and the team will have to be clear about what kinds of responses are helpful. Crisis intervention plans direct therapeutic responses when they specify a graduated series of responses to a student who is volatile and prone to out-of-control explosions. There are courses that teach methods for defusing potentially explosive situations.

**The therapeutic response is one that is supportive and aimed at achieving positive outcomes for the child.**

This is not to say that students with behavioral disabilities should be allowed to break rules without consequence or confrontation. It is to say that students with behavior disabilities should be responded to in ways that will minimize the need for the problem behavior and that will deescalate explosive situations.



A student with Oppositional/Defiant Disorder will be argumentative and disagreeable and likely to set up power struggles and authority battles. It is a part of the condition. A student with conduct disorder will resist authority. Those who interact with these students will have to be knowledgeable about what this will mean in day-to-day interactions and how they can deal with these situations most effectively. It is the team's responsibility to anticipate ways to respond to this behavior that are therapeutic and that will lead to positive outcomes for the student.

Responses can be instructional, humorous, or questioning. But a response to challenging behavior should be planned—NOT a personal reaction. Challenging behavior challenges our egos, and none of us are immune. Just as students with challenging behavior require instruction in new behaviors, educators must acquire new interaction behaviors that may not be instinctive to them.

Accommodation in the area of social interaction is both appropriate and necessary to addressing the needs of students with challenging behavior. Help the team plan for it. Knowing your child's diagnostic characteristics will help the team plan for the types of social, academic and physical accommodations that might be needed.

## 7 Expect Social Skills Instruction

Recent research has been clear about the expressed need for social skills instruction for the education of students with challenging behavior. We think of social skills as being naturally acquired through maturation and experience. Parents give children very basic social instruction in saying please and thank you, but educators don't think of having to provide direct instruction in expected classroom behavior or common social behavior. For some students this instruction is necessary. Many schools today are integrating social skills instruction into the curriculum.

Often students with challenging behavior fail at tasks because they have not developed the social skills necessary for the classroom: listening, answering questions, asking for help. These students also lack skills in interacting with peers: how to make friends, how to cooperate, how to empathize with the feelings of others. With social skill deficits, students cannot be successful in the school environment with its structured schedule, academic expectations, among hundreds of other students.

Social skills are often identified as replacement behaviors for targeted problem behavior. Instruction in how to meet social expectations must be a core part of the program for a student with problem behavior. The use of problem solving, conflict resolution, and anger management skills are critical to these students. While these skills may be taught as part of the general curriculum in some schools, students with challenging behavior need targeted direct instruction.

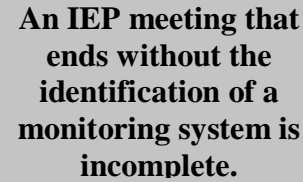


Research reported by the Center for Collaboration and Practice, a federally funded program, suggests educators use these steps to teaching social rules:

- ◆ Define the skill
- ◆ Teach the social behaviors that make up the skill
- ◆ Model the skill
- ◆ Help students role play using the skill, and
- ◆ Reinforce the student's using the skill in appropriate situations.

## 8 Communicate Often and Review Documentation

Monitoring and communication are areas where many behavior plans fail. An IEP meeting that ends without the identification of a monitoring system and a plan for regular communication is incomplete. The implementation phase of positive behavior support plans must be monitored to provide feedback to the team about its success, and regular communication between parents and school personnel about monitoring results must occur to maintain parent involvement and understanding.

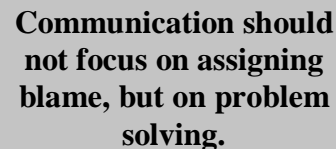


**An IEP meeting that ends without the identification of a monitoring system is incomplete.**

### **Communicate Frequently and Focus on the Monitoring Data**

Frequent communication between parents and school personnel regarding the student's progress is critical. The focus of this communication should be the review of monitoring data and discussion of problems that need to be addressed. Frequent communication can mean weekly; it can be by phone or in person. Monitoring data can be conveyed by fax, by email, or a phone conversation. Consider a face-to-face meeting monthly with a team representative and a team meeting quarterly. Regular contact will help the team remain cohesive and focused on problem solving.

Too often school personnel don't document, but rely on the memory. Communication then focuses on the most grievous instances. Meetings become a litany of complaints about the student. Parents, who have heard about many of these incidents from their child's perspective, become defensive. They respond by telling the stories they hear from their child, stories that paint a slightly different picture.



**Communication should not focus on assigning blame, but on problem solving.**

Parents point out accommodations that weren't made, or identify other influences that were not addressed which contributed to the behavior. For example, they report the boy that was name-calling that the teacher didn't stop, etc. In these interactions parents and teachers become more focused on assigning blame than problem solving.

Frequent communication that focuses on the monitoring data makes it more likely that parents and school personnel can meet before a serious incident or intolerable collection of incidents has occurred, relieving the tension that is inherent in these exchanges. Frequent communication also allows for clarification regarding a particular incident or the effectiveness of a particular accommodation or strategy.

### **Monitoring the Plan is Critical**

Monitoring behavior is not only about counting the instances of challenging behavior. It also involves monitoring of the student's use of replacement behaviors. The crux of a positive behavior support plan is the replacement of problem behaviors with existing or new behaviors that serve the same function.

The monitoring plan for a Positive Behavior Support plan should include documentation on 2 types of behaviors identified in the FBA:

- ◆ Occurrence of problem behaviors
- ◆ Use of new and existing replacement behaviors

#### **Data collection methods for positive behavior support plans should address:**

- ◆ **Instances of the problem behavior**
- ◆ **Instances of the student using the new and replacement behaviors.**

Parents should also ask for feedback about the instruction that is provided for new behaviors. Ask questions about how the new behaviors are being taught and how they are being reinforced. Unless a problem behavior is replaced by appropriate behaviors that serve the same function, the problem behaviors will not decrease.

### **Parents Can Participate in Monitoring**

As team members, parents are also asked to participate in implementing the plan by:

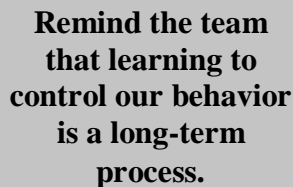
- ◆ Reinforcing the student's use of replacement behaviors
- ◆ Following through on agreed upon consequences for challenging behaviors, and
- ◆ Maintaining documentation on both at home.

Positive behavior support is a global approach to addressing challenging behavior developed by a team of stakeholders, that is, people who care about the plan's success. Although some behaviors may be school-specific, implementing the plan is not only the job of school personnel. Social skills and problem solving are common deficits for students with challenging behavior, and these deficits are apparent in all environments. Parents can maintain documentation on some of the behaviors included in the monitoring plan.

Your participation in monitoring the plan will support your child and support the team.

## 9 Remember Behavior Change is a Long Term Process

Our behavior is learned. We add new behaviors to our repertoire as we mature and those behaviors that are most often successful in meeting our needs are the behaviors that we repeat. The way we respond to situations becomes automatic, often to the point that we believe that we don't control our own behavior. Our behavior is our habitual way of responding to certain situations or stimuli.



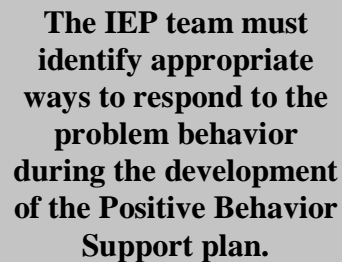
**Remind the team  
that learning to  
control our behavior  
is a long-term  
process.**

Ask anyone who has tried to lose weight or stop smoking. Habitual behavior is hard to change. Behavior change is a life style change and it requires the support and guidance that any lifestyle change requires. Weight loss programs provide education about foods, meal planning and motivational techniques. Smoking cessation programs offer a substitute for the nicotine in cigarettes and at the same time provides a systematic program for reducing nicotine intake.

Changing your child's challenging behavior will require the same kind of systematic approach and the change will not occur immediately. Behavior change is incremental. Remind the team that behavior change is a long term process.

### Need for Planned Responses to the Behavior

There are no magical behavior programs. All behavior change requires guidance, support, and motivation over time. No behavior will stop immediately. The team will need to identify reasonable responses to the challenging behavior when they develop the Positive Behavior Support plan. Some students will require a crisis intervention plan for behaviors that are dangerous or destructive. Other students will require the team to identify appropriate responses to the behavior that become an integral part of the plan.



**The IEP team must  
identify appropriate  
ways to respond to the  
problem behavior  
during the development  
of the Positive Behavior  
Support plan.**

It is critical to agree upon appropriate responses to the problem behavior while we are implementing strategies to prevent it. Knowing what to do will prevent school personnel from returning to the ineffective punitive responses that were used before. Make sure that the Positive Behavior Support plan includes direction to school personnel about appropriate ways to respond to the problem behavior.

## **10 Advocate for School-Wide Systems of Support**

Researchers recognize that individual behavior planning will become more effective when school-wide approaches to behavior support are implemented. School-wide approaches require building educators to come together to address the larger issue of problem behavior across the school community. It requires that building staff look at responsibility for addressing behavior issues as a team.

Common elements of school-wide behavior support programs have been identified through research. In these programs:

- ◆ There is a total staff commitment to addressing challenging behavior.
- ◆ There are clearly defined and communicated expectations and rules.
- ◆ There are consequences and clearly stated procedures for correcting problem behavior.
- ◆ There is an instructional component for teaching students self-control and social skills, and
- ◆ There is an individualized plan to address the needs of students with chronic problem behavior.

Addressing behavior issues in this way affects the climate of the school and promotes a common vision and common beliefs that can underscore all behavior planning. School personnel develop building wide policies that focus on instruction and prevention more than they focus on punitive and isolating responses to challenging behavior. School-wide plans:

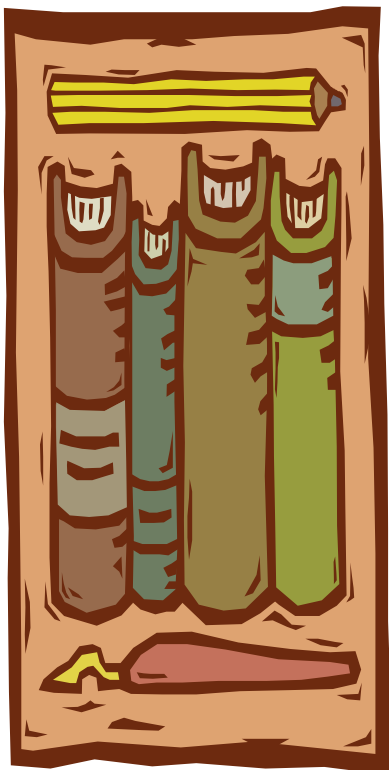
- ◆ Establish clear expectations for student behavior and ensure that these behaviors are taught, and
- ◆ Address behavior within specific settings, such as the library, the cafeteria, classroom settings, and plan for adequate supervision and organizational structure to promote positive behavior in these settings, and
- ◆ Provide support for the development of targeted intervention plans.

School-wide behavior support systems also require that the personnel in the building have the opportunity to increase their skills through training and other technical support. Within school-wide behavior support systems, the cohesive efforts of staff will support the implementation of behavior plans for individuals. You can help the IEP team get what it needs to function efficiently in implementing your child's behavior plan by advocating for school-wide systems of behavior support.

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165 WEST CENTER STREET, SUITE 302 · MARION, OHIO 43302 · 1-844-382-5452  
[www.ocecd.org](http://www.ocecd.org)