

Revised December 2015

# Positive Behavioral Interventions and IDEA 2004: Opportunities for Parenting and Teaching



*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.



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## **Basic IDEA 2004 Concepts**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that secures special education services for children with disabilities from the time they are born until they graduate from high school. The law was reauthorized by Congress in 2004, prompting a series of changes in the way special education services are implemented. These changes are continuing today and they affect the delivery of special education and related services in Ohio.

IDEA 2004 requires that for the student with disabilities who exhibits inappropriate or unacceptable behavior, schools must consider the use of positive interventions to help that student learn more acceptable alternative behaviors.

The reauthorized IDEA and its implementing regulations include provisions that address important disciplinary issues such as: the consideration of unique circumstances when determining the appropriateness of a disciplinary change in placement; expanded authority for removal of a child from his or her current placement for not more than 45 school days for inflicting a serious bodily injury at school or at a school function; the determination on a case-by-case basis as to whether a pattern of removals constitutes a change of placement; and revised standards and procedures related to the manifestation determination.

The IDEA, implementing regulations, and other important documents related to the IDEA and the regulations are found at <http://idea.ed.gov>.

Obviously, some behaviors resulting from physiologic function, such as tics associated with Tourette Syndrome or obsessive behaviors related to Obsessive Compulsive Disorder create challenges, as the behaviors do not serve a function. These behaviors are known as “non-purposive”, they do not have a purpose as do other kinds of behaviors and are not the focus of this publication.

## **Parent Participation**

Parent participation is emphasized by IDEA. 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 also grants parents the right to question the team's educational decisions with a formal hearing process. Procedural safeguards for Ohio parents are published in “*Whose IDEA Is This?*”

Parents often have been the strongest advocates for a more informed approach to helping their children learn behavioral skills. While not all parents have the skills to deal effectively with unacceptable behaviors, many have expressed frustration and anger over the use of repeated punishment that has not resulted in behavior change. Their experience has been that punishment does not address the problems their child is having, but instead addresses the symptoms. The challenge for parents and educators is working together to find new ways of understanding the interactions between a child and his or her environment so that useful interventions can be developed that lead to lasting behavior change.

The goal of adults working with children who exhibit problem behaviors is to have them learn and use more acceptable behaviors. Children learn what they are taught, and behavior is no exception. It is important to teach children acceptable alternatives to problem behaviors, as well as, to hold them accountable for appropriate behavior. Teaching or re-teaching desired behavior includes two specific strategies: meaningful incentives or rewards for appropriate behavior and meaningful, instructive consequences for misbehavior.

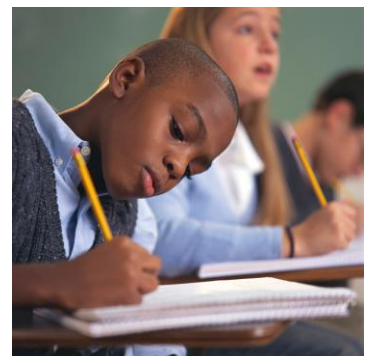
### **Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**

IDEA requires that each child identified as a student with a disability be provided FAPE. This is accomplished through the implementation of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) 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 unique needs. The services a school district provides are not determined by the child's IEP category of disability. IDEA regulations state 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."

### **Consideration of Special Factors**

Challenging behavior is one of several conditions that IDEA identifies as so fundamental to a child's education that the IEP team is directed to address it specifically. According to IDEA, **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.



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

It is important for parents to know that IDEA contains **two** statements regarding the services and supports that must be identified on the IEP. The first statement requires:

- The identification of special education and related services and supplementary aids and services to be provided to the child or on behalf of the child.

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

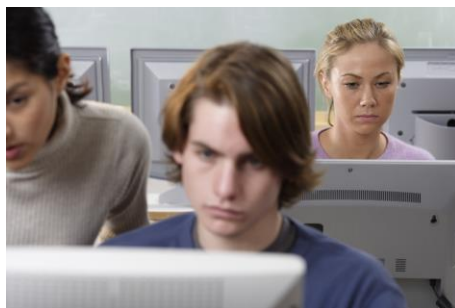
- The identification of program modifications and supports for school personnel that will be provided for the child.

IEP 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 might include de-escalation periods as a part of regular class participation or shortened class periods. In addition, the IEP team may 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. 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, with and without disabilities



## **Progress Monitoring**

In the case of a student with challenging behaviors, 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 or more frequently as determined by the IEP team. Furthermore, parents should be able to understand how behavioral goals are evaluated and 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.

## **Fundamentals of Positive Behavior Support**

In the classroom, the teacher is the role model for student behavior. At home, the parents provide the role model. A teacher who yells, threatens or punishes excessively is setting the standard for the future adult behaviors of students by demonstrating to the students how to respond to the undesirable behaviors of others. The same is true of parents. Teachers and parents who rely on punishment as a primary intervention may increase the level of unacceptable behaviors as children begin to copy the behaviors of their models.

There basically are two attitudes that people have about the behaviors of children. The first is that the child IS a problem, and the second is that the child HAS a problem.

Imagine that Billy, a 12-year-old boy, is sitting at a desk but refusing to do his schoolwork. He is oppositional and angry when his parents or the teacher remind him of his work, and may swear, spit, or even throw his work on the floor to get the adult “off his back.” How do adults feel when confronted with these behaviors? If their attitude is that Billy is lazy, unmotivated, deliberately mean or otherwise disrespectful, the likelihood is that adults will become angry, or even feel threatened. An angry person often responds to negative behavior negatively, with punishment or with coercion - “Do it or else.”

When a teacher uses punishment frequently, he or she runs the risk of becoming associated with negative consequences, and a student may come to fear or avoid the teacher. The student may become angry and try to “get even” by escalating behaviorally, walking out of the room, or refusing to accept a punishment, such as refusing to go to time-out. This cycle of behavior often results in negative consequences to the child.

What message is the child receiving? Where is the instruction in this approach? When negative behaviors result in excluding a child from his or her classroom, the child may learn that the behavior is successful in helping him or her to avoid doing the required work. Exclusion actually may be reinforcing the negative behavior it was designed to correct, known as “negative reinforcement”.

## The child IS a problem.

### What we do:

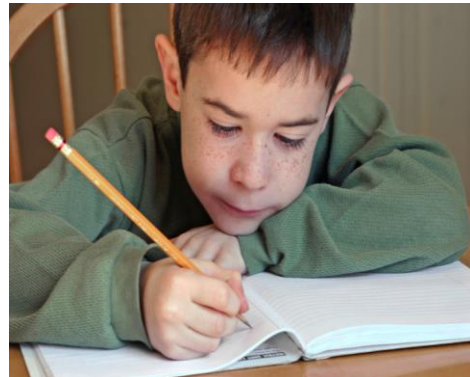
- ✓ Teach academic skills
- ✓ Control behaviors
- ✓ Positive behavior is expected
- ✓ Children and youth who violate behavior standards are punished



When adults have the attitude that the child IS a problem, the kind of instruction provided tends to be academic. Unacceptable behaviors are “contained” or “controlled”, however, acceptable behaviors often are not taught. Positive behaviors are expected of children and those who fail to meet this standard may be punished for their noncompliance.

Imagine again Billy, the 12 year old discussed in the previous model. In this scenario, Billy is still refusing to do his schoolwork, is still oppositional and angry when reminded to get back to work, and has even threatened to punch someone or to run away.

What is different is that we now have assessment data showing that Billy reads at a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level. Before him on the desk is 7<sup>th</sup> grade work. Billy was abused at age three by a neighbor. His parents recently divorced and he is dealing with intense anger over being abandoned by his father.



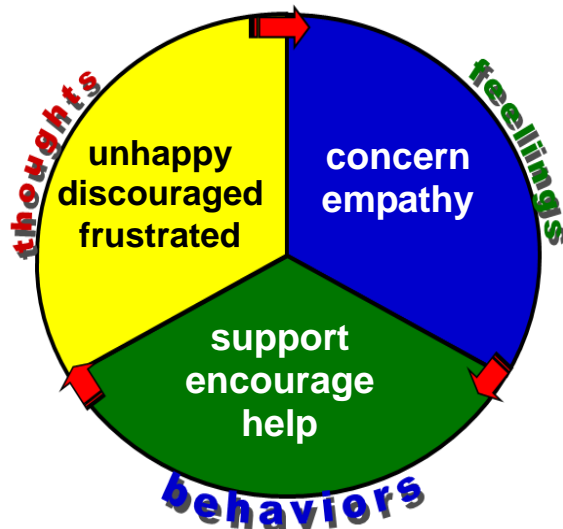
When adults understand the motivation behind misbehavior, their attitudes often change. Billy’s behaviors still are not appropriate or acceptable, and they obviously should not be permitted to continue. How his behavior is addressed, though, generally will be more constructive than in the previous model. In this more positive approach resides the opportunity for instruction.



# The child HAS a problem.

## What we do:

- ✓ Teach academic skills
- ✓ Teach behavioral skills
  - Same strategies as for other skills
  - Individualization at school for intensive problems (504, IEP, BIP)
- ✓ Positive behavior is expected and taught
- ✓ Positive behaviors are reinforced
- ✓ Negative behaviors receive consequences that are meaningful and instructive



When adults have the attitude that the child HAS a problem, instruction is both in academic and behavioral areas. Positive behaviors are taught or re-taught, using the same strategies used in teaching academic skills. When children use the positive behavior skills that are expected, they are recognized, reinforced, or rewarded for using these skills.

When they display negative behaviors, adults should impose consequences that make sense and that are meaningful to a child. As an example, if a youth spray paints graffiti on a school wall, having him clean all the walls is a consequence that is designed to help him understand the damage that spray paint does to the environment, and helps him to understand the difficulty and expense of cleaning up after such damage. This is much more effective than suspension.

## From Punishment to Prevention

IDEA 2004 statute states, “The IEP team will, in the case of a child whose behavior impedes the child’s learning or that of others, consider the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports, and other strategies to address that behavior.” This requires a basic shift in thinking about how to address challenging behavior. This change requires thinking about prevention through instruction and support for appropriate behavior as the focus of all behavior intervention 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.

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.

The team will develop a Positive Behavior Support plan that is based on the information discussed. The plan will include strategies to change 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 also will include direction in how to respond to the problem behavior when it occurs. The plan also may include identified meeting times for team members to access training, review information, and make adaptations to the plan.

The behavior plan 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 also may 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.

The team will develop a monitoring system to track the plan's effectiveness. This monitoring system will track the occurrences of the problem behavior, along with 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, the parent, the teachers and an IEP team and a team representative to maintain your understanding of and involvement in the plan.

### **IDEA STATUTE SEC.614 (b)(3)**

Each local educational agency shall ensure that-

- the child is assessed **in all areas** of suspected disability;
- assessment tools and strategies that provide relevant information that directly assists persons in determining the educational needs of the child are provided.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized in 2004, with expanded requirements that affect children and youth who have problem behaviors. IDEA specifically requires that the IEP team “shall...in the case of a child whose behavior interferes with his or her learning or that of others, consider, when appropriate, strategies, including positive behavioral interventions, strategies and supports to address that behavior.” Regardless of a child’s disability, if he or she has problems learning because of persistent behavioral concerns, or if the behaviors of the child are significantly disruptive to other children, the IEP team must consider whether specific interventions are needed to help the child learn new behavioral skills. At times this will require a “functional behavioral assessment” to help the team develop appropriate interventions. Any needed interventions must be written into the child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP), and must be used consistently across environments where the behavior is a concern.

### **What is a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)?**

The term "**Functional Behavioral Assessment**" comes from what is called a "Functional Assessment" or "Functional Analysis" in the field of applied behavior analysis. This is the process of determining the cause, antecedent or trigger ("function") of behavior before developing an intervention. The intervention must be based on the hypothesized cause (function) of behavior.

Failure to base the intervention on the specific cause, antecedent or trigger (function) very often results in ineffective and unnecessarily restrictive procedures.

For example, consider the case of a young child who has learned that screaming is an effective way of avoiding or escaping unpleasant tasks. Using timeout in this situation would provide the child with exactly what he wants (avoiding the task) and is likely to make the problem worse, not better. Without an adequate functional behavioral assessment, we would not know the true function of the young child’s screaming and, therefore, may select an inappropriate intervention.

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 Behavior 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.

Problem behaviors generally occur in relationships between the student and the environment. FBAs should collect data from as many sources as possible, including samples of the student's class work. Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) should include behavior goals and positive behavior interventions, based on the data collected from the FBA. Positive behavior interventions are based on a Functional Behavior Assessment.

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 may be gathered by the IEP team and professionals skilled in the area of behavioral assessments by:

- Direct observation,
- Review of medical and school records,
- Achievement and educational testing,
- 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 **function** of a behavior is not the problem - new behaviors that are taught should serve the same function.

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 behavioral support plan.

The absence of "poor or unacceptable" behavior is not necessarily correlated with the outcomes that children and their families desire. Stopping a difficult behavior, as important as that can be, may mean that the behavior is simply replaced with an even more difficult behavior - unless the child has been taught alternative behaviors that serve the same function.

To reach the outcomes (future goals) that children and their parents want means that parents and schools must both build on children's existing strengths as well as teach skills that have not been mastered or that have not become habits.

A Functional Behavioral Assessment can look very different from child to child, depending upon his or her needs. B.F. Skinner, a noted psychologist, often called the "father of modern behaviorism," believed that the consequences that one received as a result of a behavior had a large effect on whether the behavior was repeated.

Understanding how the environment contributes to the development of inappropriate behavior can lead to making adaptations to the environment in order to reduce the incidence of negative behaviors or increase the occurrence of positive ones.



## **IDEA STATUTE SEC.615 (k)(1) (D) SERVICES**

A child with a disability who is removed from the child's current placement under subparagraph (G) (irrespective of whether the behavior is determined to be a manifestation of the child's disability) or subparagraph (C) shall—

(i) continue to receive educational services, as provided in section 612(a)(1), so as to enable the child to continue to participate in the general education curriculum, although in another setting, and to progress toward meeting the goals set out in the child's IEP; and

(ii) receive, as appropriate, a functional behavioral assessment, behavioral intervention services and modifications, that are designed to address the behavior violation so that it does not recur.

### **What is a Manifestation Determination?**

If a school district wishes to force a change of placement or suspend a child for an amount greater than 10 days, it must conduct a manifestation determination. The term itself means that the district must decide (determination) if the conduct which was the reason for the sought after discipline was a result (manifestation) of the child's disability. If it was not, then the suspension/change of placement may proceed. If it was, then it may not. The reason for this is simple. If the behavior was related to the child's disability, i.e. impassivity, then the child was not in control of their actions and the discipline would be unwarranted. A manifestation determination looks like an IEP team meeting, although there likely will be more school district personnel in attendance.

There are two questions that must be answered.

- (I) if the conduct in question was caused by, or had a direct and substantial relationship to, the child's disability; or
- (II) if the conduct in question was the direct result of the local educational agency's failure to implement the IEP or Behavioral Intervention Plan.

If the local educational agency, the parent, and relevant members of the IEP Team determine that either sub-clause (I) or (II) is applicable for the child, the conduct shall be determined to be a manifestation of the child's disability.

If the local educational agency, the parent, and relevant members of the IEP Team make the determination that the conduct was a manifestation of the child's disability, the IEP Team shall—

- (i) conduct a Functional Behavioral Assessment, and implement a Behavioral Intervention Plan for such child, provided that the local educational agency had not conducted such assessment prior to such determination before the behavior that resulted in a change in placement;
- (ii) in the situation where a Behavioral Intervention Plan has been developed, review the Behavioral Intervention Plan and modify it, as necessary, to address the behavior; and
- (iii) except where there are special applicable circumstances, return the child to the placement from which the child was removed, unless the parent and the local educational agency agree to a change of placement as part of the modification of the revised Behavioral Intervention Plan.

## **What are Positive Behavior Interventions?**

Positive behavior interventions are planned interventions that take place **before the onset** of problem behaviors, **before escalation** of those behaviors, or **to prevent the behaviors from re-occurring**. Children's behavior is largely dependent on the behaviors of others. How adults choose to intervene to stop or change a behavior gives a child cues about whether or not to try the same behavior under similar circumstances. When a general response to misbehavior is punishment, without understanding why the behavior occurs in the first place, it is not possible to know whether the behavior being exhibited is positively reinforced. Consequences for behavior, whether positive or negative, must be personally meaningful to a child in order to reinforce or suppress that behavior.

If it is possible to identify events in the environment that contribute to problem behavior (class size, teacher-child interaction, curriculum, medicines, etc.) it may be possible to modify those events sufficiently to inhibit or reduce the behavior. If a teacher knows, for instance that Mary becomes argumentative when seated next to a particular student because she and the student have a history of disagreements outside school, simply separating the two students may solve (or partially solve) the problem. If Mary's arguments with her peer result from a lack of social skills, providing social skills instruction as part of her program may give Mary the skills to get along with the student.

A Behavioral Intervention Plan is designed to change the outcome by preventing the behavior from actually occurring, reducing the severity of the behavior, by de-escalating the behavior before it becomes extreme, or by assisting the student to use skills he or she has been taught to make a better behavioral choice.

An understanding that most behaviors are governed by their consequences is key to planning interventions. A child has a fight (behavior) and is suspended (consequence). If the child does not want to be in school, he or she may learn that fighting is a good way to get sent home. If the child wants to gain attention from his peers or the teacher, fighting may be used again as a way to secure attention and status. Any time a child exhibits a behavior (acceptable or unacceptable) that is successful in meeting one of his or her needs, it is likely that the behavior will be repeated. Behavior serves a logical function for the child.

A traditional approach to dealing with difficult behavior is to wait until the behavior occurs, then impose a consequence. People who use this approach expect children to be “good” and punish them when they are not. Some adults believe that punishment is good medicine for unacceptable behavior. The intent is to provide a consequence following a problem behavior that makes it less likely that the behavior will recur in the future. While most would agree that problem behavior needs a response, often nothing is done to teach, support or sustain appropriate behavior prior to the occurrence of the problem behavior. The flaw in this approach is that the child does not develop appropriate skills as a result of punishment - the consequence does not teach replacement behaviors. If a child is able to learn appropriate behaviors to achieve the same desired outcome as is gained through using inappropriate behaviors, the need for the negative behaviors no longer exists.

Topography is a word that is used to describe the shape of a landscape. It is also used to describe “what a behavior looks like,” in specific terms. When describing a behavior, avoid terms like “off-task, disruptive, or aggressive.” Instead, what a child actually does is described, “Mary hit Ann on the forearm with her library book.” A focus on topography is useful in describing a behavior, but does not, by itself, offer insight into what interventions might be effective to help change the behavior.

Children’s behavior can change if adults:

- ✓ **teach** the behaviors we expect to see
- ✓ **model** those behaviors
- ✓ **consistently recognize and reward** appropriate behaviors when they occur
- ✓ **consistently enforce meaningful consequences** for behavioral violations



Behaviors are governed by consequences. Behaviors that result in desirable consequences for the child are likely to be retained or strengthened. Behaviors that do not result in desirable consequences are discarded or weakened.

## **What We Know About Behavior**

1. We do something.
2. We analyze the results of our action.
3. We decide what to do next.

Children learn from their experiences. For example:

A child cries at the grocery store because he wants candy. His father gives him some candy. The child learns that crying will result in him getting what he wanted. The behavior is positively reinforced and will continue happening.

A better way to handle the situation:

A child cries at the grocery store because he wants candy. His father refuses, and ignores the crying. The child learns that crying does not get him what he wants. Eventually, after a number of repeat tries, the behavior fades.



## The A, B, C's of Behavior

A = Antecedent – A cause, course or event that influences the development of a behavior or behaviors:

- Size of an environment
- Number of people in it
- Specific event, time of day, etc.

B = Behavior – What one does in response to the event, cause or condition. Behavior (positive or negative) fulfills a specific need for a child.

C = Consequence – What happens as a result of a behavior that affects whether it is likely to happen again. If the consequence of a behavior meets a need, the behavior is likely to be repeated.

Antecedent: The work is too hard.

Behavior: I throw my chair.

Consequence: The teacher gets angry. I get sent to the office. I do not do the work.

Did the behavior meet a need? What can we predict about this behavior?

## 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.), child's 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.



For example, 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. Redesign 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 when 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.



## Teach the Behavior You Expect

Begin with simple rules (ages 2 – 5).

**“Be respectful of others.”**

Describe what the rules mean in specific terms.

- Respect means speaking in normal voice and tone.
- Respect means keeping hands/feet to yourself.

State your expectations for behavior. Provide instructions about what to do instead. Provide examples of expected behavior.

Discuss and model the expected behaviors:

- At home and outside the home.
- Re-teach regularly.

Be sure the expectation is positive:

- “Once you have finished picking up your toys you may watch cartoons.”

Avoid a negative statement like, “you cannot watch cartoons until you have picked up your toys.”

For an older child, an example of a positive expectation would be:

- “Once you have finished your chores, you may go to Mary’s house.”

Avoid a negative statement like, “you cannot go to Mary’s house until the chores are finished.”



## Teach Children to Self-manage Behavior

Homework, school work, and chores

### Time management

- Define and teach routines the child will use.
- Provide a checklist of activities that child can mark off as completed.
- Begin on time.
- Have materials ready for the work being addressed.
- Stay with the task until completed.

### Attitude

- Be respectful.
- Have materials ready for the work being addressed.
- Ask for help when needed.



## Provide Meaningful Positive Incentives

Teaching is not always enough to change behavior over the long haul. Children need to be recognized and rewarded when they are meeting the expectations that have been established. Positive recognition (rewards, other reinforcements, praise) must occur more frequently than negative recognition (at least a 4 to 1 ratio).

## **Interventions That Work**

1. Planned Ignoring – Plan ahead to ignore specific behaviors that are directed at gaining the attention of the teacher or others. Do not use this for peer problems.

Ignoring takes practice. You must plan to do it! Planned ignoring may work for:

- Calling out answers in class.
- Not having materials ready for class.
- Interrupting the teacher.
- Whistling or humming.

Provide the attention the student is seeking when he or she displays appropriate behaviors.

2. Preventive Cueing (Signal Interference) – Used to alert the student who is doing something unacceptable.

- A frown
- A shake of the head
- Make eye contact
- Point to a seat for a wandering student
- Snap fingers to convey the need to pay attention or to stop a behavior from escalating

Do not show approval when using preventative cueing.

3. Proximity Control

- Stand closer to the student who is beginning to have a problem with behavior
- Move the student's desk closer to the teacher (less effective)

Be sure that proximity is not seen as a threat to the student. Use this method during question and answer periods or when giving directions. Pairing this intervention with “preventive cueing” may be helpful with some students.

4. Touch control – light, non-aggressive physical contact:

- Placing a hand on the student's shoulder.
- Taking a child's hand to lead him or her back to their desk.

\*It is very important for anyone using touch control to be sensitive to the needs of the individual student. Some students may perceive any form of touch as aggression if they have sensitivity or sensory issues.

5. Nonverbal Warnings – Place cue cards inconspicuously on a student’s desk as a reminder to change the behavior, or point to the posted rules.
6. Discipline Privately – Whenever possible, do not discipline in front of the student’s peers. Students can gain power from daring to “take on” the teacher in a disagreement. A child is more likely to accept discipline, if his or her peers are not watching.
7. Humor – A lighthearted comment or joke can let a student “save face” when in a confrontational situation with an adult. Never ridicule or use sarcasm.
8. Positive Phrasing – Let the student know exactly what behavior is acceptable, not just what is not allowed.

State the reinforcement for carrying out the desired behavior:

- “I will call on you to answer as soon as you raise your hand.”
  - “I need for you to stop talking and concentrate on your work, so that your classmates can concentrate on their work.”
9. Behavioral Shaping – Reinforce behavior that is close to the desired behavior, then raise the criteria for reinforcement in small steps until the student reaches the desired goal.
  10. Reinforce Learning – Go over rules and expectations daily, demonstrating if necessary. Remind student of the rules. “Remember, the rules say that you are not to interrupt others.” Reminders that do not redirect the behavior must be followed with meaningful consequences.



11. Praise a student who is performing well – Be sure to give positive attention to a student who is performing well, so that other students can hear. “I sure like the way Sally is picking up her things and putting them away.”
12. Encourage students to ask for help – Let students know that it is always acceptable and encouraged for them to ask for help if they need it. Be careful not to withhold help for students who are too shy or angry to ask.
13. Find opportunities for a student to help – Make a student feel important by asking them to be of service, such as, line leader, help with food drives, etc.
14. Give advance notice of changes – Some children do not handle change well. Develop clear routines and expectations for behavior during the day. Be sure to give the class and/or a student advance notice of any changes that will be taking place in their schedule, activities or routine. Give reminders as well.
15. Place low priority behavior before high priority behavior – such as scheduling spelling immediately before recess.
16. Teach youth how to keep track of their own behaviors (self-monitoring; a check sheet to show frequency and occurrence of a specific behavior).
17. Move about the classroom. Acknowledge anything a child has done well.





## Resources

PACER Center, 8161 Normandale Boulevard, Minneapolis, MN. 55437-1044.  
[Pacer@pacer.org](mailto:Pacer@pacer.org); [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org). 1-952-838-9000

LD OnLine, The world's leading website on learning disabilities and ADHD.  
[www.ldonline.org](http://www.ldonline.org)

ED.gov; U.S. Department of Education – Building the Legacy, IDEA 2004.  
<http://idea.ed.gov>

WrightsLaw Special Education Law and Advocacy. [www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com).  
Email: [webmaster@wrightslaw.com](mailto:webmaster@wrightslaw.com).





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