Managing Classroom Behavior:
Learning How

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The prospect of managing student behavior can make any teacher anxious. Certainly novice educators[1] and even many experienced ones approach a new school year with some trepidation about the behavioral challenges they might face. With teacher attrition directly linked to the complications of behavior management,[2] all teachers need—and deserve—support, mentoring, and resources to help them conduct successful classrooms. But the primary purpose of this desired success is not so much to ensure that teachers experience a good school year. Students need to know how to behave appropriately if they are going to learn.

Yet many students come to school lacking the skills, information, or awareness they need to behave appropriately. What can be done?

Notes

1. Jones, V., & Jones, L. (2007). *Comprehensive classroom management: Creating communities of support and solving problems* (8th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

2. Oliver, R. M., & Reschly, D. J. (2007, December). Effective classroom management: Teacher preparation and professional development. *National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality* issue paper.

3. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2005). *The condition of education 2005*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. **http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo. asp?pubid=2005094**

4. See **https://schoolclimate.org/climate/**

Extensive research shows that school climate profoundly influences student behavior.[3] When this climate is intentionally created to be positive and supportive, research shows that students respond favorably—their behavior is more positive and they learn more. This influence is particularly powerful for students with disabilities.[4]

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has developed general guidelines for how students with disabilities should be supported in school, how their behavioral issues can and should be addressed, and how to create this kind of positive school climate: "Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by—(F) providing incentives for whole-school approaches . . . [to] positive behavioral interventions and supports, and early intervening services" [IDEA, Section 1400].

Both law and research identify school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) as a proven approach to establishing the kind of climate needed to promote student success. Within a PBIS system, three levels (or tiers) of supports are established: At the first tier, all students are given clear, consistent, positive instruction on how to behave. At the second, students who show signs of challenging behavior are given those next-level supports, usually in groups. The third tier is reserved for those students whose behavior requires intensive intervention.

The Special EDge

Even if a school doesn't have a system of PBIS, there is a great deal teachers can do at the classroom level to create a healthy climate, promote positive behavior, and ensure success—for themselves as well as for their students. The following specific practices are proven to be effective in supporting positive behaviors and reducing or eliminating challenging behavior for all students, with and without disabilities.

Comprehensive Classroom and Behavioral Management

This first-tier approach requires careful planning and effort. It's designed for and shared with all students, typically at the beginning of the school year, and regularly and consistently reviewed throughout the year. But the time spent in preparation and in direct instruction will set expectations for a successful school year and decrease the likelihood of many behavioral challenges. A comprehensive plan includes several components:

1. A statement of purpose that is brief, positive, and clear; one that conveys the goal of the plan and communicates why the plan is important.
2. Rules that are positively stated, direct, and observable and that state expectations for students while they are in the classroom.
3. Procedures that address both daily routines and less frequent activities and that identify the steps students should take to successfully complete each task.
4. Consequences that clearly articulate what happens when the rules and procedures are violated or ignored and that are designed to encourage appropriate behavior and discourage inappropriate behavior.
5. An action plan that determines how the behavior management plan will be implemented, shared, and maintained.

While a comprehensive classroom management plan will help teachers successfully address most behaviors, some students may demonstrate disruptive and noncompliant behaviors that require additional intervention.

The Acting-Out Cycle

When students act out, teachers often think that the inappropriate behaviors "came out of nowhere." Yet these kinds of behaviors—from shouting or defying instructions to fighting or destroying property—typically occur in a predictable cycle. A calm student is disrupted by some kind of trigger that leads to agitation, which accelerates if the trigger isn't interrupted, leading to more extreme behaviors.

By understanding this cycle, teachers can effectively intervene before the behavior becomes extreme, minimizing or preventing the results. For example, a teacher may notice a student tapping his pencil or showing other signs of agitation. At this point, the teacher can give the student individualized instruction, allow the student to take a break, or redirect the student in some other way.

Evidence-based Behavioral Interventions

"High-probability requests" represents another strategy that promotes compliant behavior in potentially volatile situations. Teachers first prompt students to engage in behaviors in which they are likely to comply (e.g., passing out papers), then immediately follow this kind of request with one they are less likely to perform (e.g., independent academic tasks). Research shows that students are more likely to comply when they are already doing what they are supposed to do.

"Choice making" also increases compliance. For example, if a student struggles with a particular learning task, the teacher can allow her to choose from a number of different ways to complete it. This list might include the option to either write or type an assignment or to work either independently or with a peer.

Teachers may also allow students to choose when to complete a task within the school day. Choice making promotes a sense of control and autonomy for the student and has also been shown to increase compliance.

For the majority of students, a comprehensive management plan and evidence-based behavioral interventions provide adequate support for appropriate classroom behavior. In some cases, however, more focused interventions may be necessary.

Individualized Interventions

Students with severe and persistent behavioral challenges will need individualized supports. These supports include helping students learn self-regulation strategies if they struggle to stay on task—how to monitor and manage their own classroom behaviors (e.g., bringing required materials to class or listening to directions for assignments)—and set goals for improvement.

Functional behavioral assessment (FBA) is another individualized strategy for addressing problem behaviors that threaten to become serious. Through FBA, teachers and other education professionals, such as school psychologists, work to determine the reasons for the challenging behaviors by analyzing the antecedents to problem behavior (i.e., conditions that precede the behavior) and the consequences (i.e., responses that follow the behavior). Educators then develop a behavior intervention plan (BIP) to address these behaviors by adjusting antecedents (triggers, such as a frustrating assignment) and consequences (the rewards or results, such as being removed from class so the child doesn't have to deal with the frustration) that contribute to the problem. The student then learns appropriate replacement behaviors.

California educators interested in learning and mastering these practices have a wealth of supports available to them. Both the IRIS Center and PENT (Positive Environment, Network of Trainers) offer free online training modules and resources to support the implementation of these effective methods (see table on page 4). Several national projects also provide invaluable information and support for educators.

The IRIS Center

The IRIS Center, funded through Vanderbilt University, is dedicated to improving school outcomes for all children, especially those with disabilities. The center develops and makes available
at no cost interactive training modules, case studies, activities, and other instructional materials through its Web site: *www.iriscenter.com*. This national center has a branch in California at Claremont Graduate University (CGU). Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs,[5] IRIS@CGU provides training to teacher educators and professional development providers across the nation through Web Tours, Webinars, Faculty Seminars, and Work Sessions. IRIS@CGU coordinates these training and outreach services.

PENT

A California Positive Behavior Initiative, PENT has been providing information and resources to educators in the state for more than 20 years. The organization's goal is to help educators achieve high educational outcomes through the use of positive, proactive strategies. PENT's Web site disseminates evidence-based behavioral practices and helpful information, as do PENT's widely established network of trainers.

National Centers

Two national centers also offer online, evidence-based resources and training for teachers interested in improving their practice relative to student behavior: (1) The National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports at *http://www.pbis.org* and (2) the Center on Social and Emotional Development for Early Learning (CSEFEL) at *http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu*.

Conclusion

Classroom and behavior management can be one of the most challenging aspects of a teacher's job; it is also a critically important one. Students cannot learn in a chaotic environment—whether it is of their own making or caused by others. By understanding the essentials of an evidence-based behavioral approach and accessing the many available resources, teachers can build the knowledge and develop the skills they need to effectively manage their classrooms and support optimal learning for every student. ▶

Resources for
Classroom & Behavioral Management

Early Childhood/ Early Intervention & Prevention

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (CSEFEL):
- Preschool and Infant Toddler Modules, both in English and Spanish—
http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/training_modules.html

Classroom and Behavior Management Plans

IRIS
- *Classroom Management* (Part 1):
Learning the Components of a Comprehensive Behavior Management Plan—
http://iriscenter.com/module/beh1/ and

- *Classroom Management* (Part 2):
Developing Your Own Comprehensive Behavior Management Plan—
http://iriscenter.com/module/beh2/

Positive Environments, Network of Trainers (PENT)
- *Strategies to Achieve Success with Difficult Learners: Effective Strategies for Successful Teaching*—
http://www.pent.ca.gov/pos/cl/classroom.html

- *BIP Desk Reference*: A comprehensive resource and training manual for developing behavior intervention plans and structuring school environments to prevent behavior problems. The manual outlines how to write and evaluate a comprehensive behavior plan—
http://www.pent.ca.gov/dsk/bipmanual.html

National Technical Assistance (TA) Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- *Classroom Checklists, Effective Classroom Plan, Inventory Checklist; Classroom Management Self-Assessment* (Revised)—
http://www.pbis.org/school/secondary_level/default.aspx

The Acting Out Cycle

IRIS
- *Addressing Disruptive and Noncompliant Behaviors* (Part 1): Understanding the Acting-Out Cycle—
http://iriscenter.com/module/bi1/

PBIS TA Center
- *Understanding and Responding to Escalating Behavior*—
http://www.pbis.org/school/tertiary_level/default.aspx

Behavioral Interventions

IRIS
- *Addressing Disruptive and Noncompliant Behaviors* (Part 2): Behavioral Interventions—
http://iriscenter.com/module/bi2/

PENT
- *BIP Desk Reference*—
http://www.pent.ca.gov/dsk/bipmanual.html

Self-regulating Strategies

IRIS
- *SOS: Helping Students Become Independent Learners*—
http://iriscenter.com/module/sr/

PENT
- *Positive Environments and RtI: Classrooms*—
http://www.pent.ca.gov/pos/cl/classroom.html

Functional Behavioral Assessment

IRIS
- *Functional Behavioral Assessment: Identifying the Reasons for Problem Behavior and Developing a Behavior Plan*—
http://iriscenter.com/module/fba/

PENT
- *Behavior Planning*—
http://www.pent.ca.gov/beh/behplan.htm

PBIS TA Center
- Functional Assessment Checklist for Teachers and Staff (FACTS); Functional Behavior Support Plan—
http://www.pbis.org/school/tertiary_level/default.aspx

Funding for Professional Development

CalSTAT
- Funds for behavioral trainings (awarded on a "first come, first served" basis) are available for schools from CalSTAT—
http://www.calstat.org/ta.html