

P-5: Establish behavior management plans

How can I differentiate my behavior management plans?

Some students, particularly some students with behavior-related disabilities, will need more formalized support in learning to manage their behavior. Individual behavior contracts (see Tools section for examples) allow you to construct a specific set of expectations, consequences, and rewards for students with whom the regular classroom system is not working. Consider the reflection of Sara Cotner (South Louisiana '00):

One of my third grade students had bi-polar disorder and was notorious for destructive and disrespectful behavior the year before she entered my class. Her behavior was so severe, in fact, that she had to be institutionalized for several weeks at a time. I introduced an individualized behavior modification plan. It was a simple table with our daily schedule, and she earned stars in the boxes for good behavior. If she misbehaved, I would record the behavior exactly, and her grandmother signed the sheet each night. The student would receive a certificate for earning a certain number of stars in a day. When she collected enough certificates, she could trade them in for time on the computer. After three weeks of this individualized system, she no longer needed it. She responded very favorably to the class-wide positive reinforcement system.

In some cases, you will need to access additional help from one or more of your fellow teachers or administrators. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that for any student who needs extra behavioral support, the IEP team (those who help create and monitor a student's Individualized Education Plan) must conduct a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) (see Tools section) as well. An FBA involves a school-based team implementing a behavior intervention plan that includes positive behavioral interventions and supports for a student with behavior disabilities.

The underlying assumption of the FBA is that every behavior is serving a function, whether it's to get attention, escape tasks, obtain objects, alleviate boredom, or any number of purposes. A comprehensive assessment of a student's behavior and the social, emotional, cognitive, and environmental factors associated with the behavior should reveal the behavior's function. While the FBA process can be done in a variety of ways, the following example presents a simplified version of the four steps usually involved in the process:

- 1. Clearly define the problem behaviors(s):** Jason gets out of his desk and walks around the room. While walking around the room, he often taps on other students' desks.
- 2. Identify events, times, settings, and situations that predict when the behaviors will and will not occur:** Jason does this in social studies, language arts, and science. He does not do this in math, art, or health.
- 3. Gather data on possible causes of misbehavior (What is the student "getting" out of misbehaving? What the function of the misbehavior?):** After several observations and interviews with Jason, his teachers, and his parents, it seems that the function of the misbehavior is task avoidance. He seems to exhibit the behavior most frequently when asked to do something that involves writing.
- 4. Develop and test a hypothesis:** The hypothesis is that Jason has difficulty with writing and misbehaves as a way to avoid it. To test the hypothesis, his teachers planned activities that did not involve writing and observed and charted Jason's behavior for a couple days. He did not get out of his seat and walk around the room. To be sure their hypothesis was correct, they then incorporated writing back into their plans and observed that the misbehavior started again.

One outcome of an FBA is an understanding of why a student misbehaves, but the more important outcome should be a behavior intervention plan developed specifically for the student; one that is based on the results of the FBA. In Jason's case, a plan was developed that included individualizing his writing assignments, teaching him how to ask for help when he needed it, allowing him to use a computer for longer writing assignments, giving him the opportunity to take breaks during writing assignments, and a contract that included rewards for staying in his seat and consequences for getting out of his seat. Function-based behavior support allows teachers to individualize, or differentiate, based on a particular student's needs. The behavior intervention plan should include positive strategies and, in many cases, skill-building interventions. Sometimes students do not have the appropriate *skills* to exhibit appropriate behavior in some contexts, so these skills must be *taught*.

The plan may also involve changes in the student's routine; when a student's problem behavior is predictable, changes in the student's routine can make it less likely that the problem behavior will occur. For example, Moninda blurts out a lot

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during class, especially in her afternoon classes. Since she takes medication for ADHD, her teachers meet with her parents to find out if there have been changes in her medical treatment. Her parents inform you that she no longer takes her medication because it was making her tired. As a solution, her parents may want to take her back to her physician, but they may not. The solution may be as simple as a schedule change where Moninda takes her academic subjects in the morning and PE, art, and life skills in the afternoon. Once the plan is in place, it is very important for the team to monitor, evaluate, and adjust as necessary