Maryland School Mental Health Alliance*

Managing Classroom Behavior
Information for School Clinicians

Definition
Teachers are increasingly being asked to teach students with serious behavioral and emotional problems, due to the current emphasis on inclusion, the growing diversity of the student population, and increasingly chaotic home environments.

Why Do We Care?
While some children require mental health services beyond what the school can provide, there is a growing body of research that supports specific techniques and tools that can be readily used by school-based counselors and teachers to reduce or eliminate problem behavior.

What Can We Do About It?
1. **Work with the teacher to:**
   - Post 4-5 classroom rules that are simple, positively-framed (tell the kids what to do instead of what not to do), and easily seen. Include consequences for following or not following the rules.
   - Be consistent in observing and following the rules.
   - Make sure that students understand what behavior is and is not acceptable.
   - Move around the classroom often (teacher proximity helps), and try different seating arrangements to maximize positive interactions between groups of students.
   - Use consistent routines for all classroom activities, from how to ask a question to what to do when you have to use the restroom.

2. **Conduct a functional behavioral assessment of the student**
   - Collect data through observation and teacher reports
   - Identify the likely antecedents, consequences, and contexts in which the problem behavior occurs
   - Determine the function of the problem behavior
   - Teach and reinforce (at school and, ideally, at home) more adaptive replacement behaviors that will serve the same function as the maladaptive behavior
   - For severe behavior problems, a more complex functional assessment may be necessary; if so, consult the resources sited on this handout for more complete information about conducting functional behavioral assessments.

3. **Develop a positive behavioral plan to address the underlying motivation**

   - Work with the teacher(s) and family, if possible, to develop a daily behavior report card, homework contract, a "check-in, check-out" system, or other behavioral treatment that will serve to monitor daily school behavior and reinforce positive behavior.
   - See examples of simple functional assessment forms and behavioral report cards in this handout, below.

Helpful Links:
Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice (2000). *Addressing Student Problem Behavior.*
http://cecp.air.org/fba/default.asp

Intervention Central offers free tools and resources to help school staff and parents to promote positive classroom behaviors and foster effective learning for all children and youth.
www.interventioncentral.org

Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health. Fact sheets on specific disorder areas provide excellent tips information about educational implications, instructional strategies and classroom modifications appropriate to each disorder.
http://www.macmh.org/publications/fact_sheets/fact_sheets.php

National Association of School Psychologists *Helping the Student with ADHD in the Classroom: Information for Families and Educators.*
http://www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/special%20needs%20template.pdf

National Mental Health Association:
Fact sheet on ADHD. **http://www.nmha.org/go/information/get-info/ad/hd/ad/hd-and-kids,**
Fact sheet on promoting children's mental health.
http://www1.nmha.org/children/children_mh_matters/promoting.cfm

Additional Resources:

Babkie, A. M. (2006). Be Proactive in Managing Classroom Behavior. *Intervention in School and Clinic,* 41(3), 184-187.

Barbetta, P. M., Norona, K. L., and Bicard, D. F. (2005). Classroom Behavior Management: A Dozen Common Mistakes and What to Do Instead. *Preventing School Failure,* 49(3), 11-19.

Gunter, P. L., Coutinho, M. J., and Cade, T. (2002). Classroom Factors Linked with Academic Gains Among Students with Emotional and Behavioral Problems. *Preventing School Failure,* 46(3), 126-132.

Hawken. L. S., and Horner, R. H. (2003). Evaluation of a Targeted Intervention Within a Schoolwide System of Behavior Support. *Journal of Behavioral Education,* 12(3), 225-240.

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