Maryland School Mental Health Alliance*

Managing Classroom Behavior
Information for Teachers and School Staff

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?

Though the majority of children respond positively to approaches that emphasize positive, clearly-defined, school-wide expectations, a significant sub-group of students need more targeted interventions to prevent problem behavior patterns and to succeed in school. These children and adolescents typically need a modified classroom environment along with practice learning behavioral expectations that may differ from those they have learned at home or in their community.

What can you do about it?

There are specific things you can do in the classroom to prevent and manage problem behavior:

- Post 4-5 classroom rules that are simple, positively-framed (tell your 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 your students understand what behavior is and is not acceptable.
- Try to 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 requesting to use the restroom.

Carefully observe and measure what is really going on:

- **Rather than defining what a student is doing wrong** (hitting, getting out of his seat, yelling), **ask yourself what the function of the behavior may be** (i.e. are they trying to get something, like attention, or avoid something, like school work that is too difficult, by acting out?).
- **Notice what is happening in your classroom both before and after a student misbehaves.** There are many tools available to keep track of these antecedents and consequences, but they all essentially chart a student's behavior based on what is happening in the immediate environment. If, for example, Billy mostly acts out in math, then perhaps the material is too challenging, or the time of day is difficult (could he be hungry?), or he has trouble with a specific student or teacher. What happens after Billy acts out? Is he rewarded for his negative behavior by receiving attention from you or his peers? Has he been able to avoid doing the work?

Develop a plan to address the underlying motivation:

- **Use your observations to develop a theory about why a student is misbehaving, and address the underlying motivation**. If Billy is acting out to get attention from peers, for example, then help him learn other ways of getting attention from peers, such as joining an activity or sharing something.

- Teach the student an alternate behavior and reinforce that behavior in a way that will give the student the same response (attention, feeling of competence, etc.).
- Help the student use the more appropriate behaviors by providing frequent feedback (verbal and non-verbal cues).
- Focus on the student's motivation, and relate the material to his or her life.
- If the function of the behavior is to avoid doing work, try a different teaching technique, review directions, consider peer tutoring, or help the student with specific aspects of the work.
- Praise students frequently for replacement (good) behaviors.

Helpful Forms for Observing and Monitoring Behavior:

Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice (2000). *Addressing Student Problem Behavior. Fact sheet on Functional Behavioral Assessment. http://cecp.air.org/fba/default.asp*

McDougal, J. L. and Chafouleas, S. M. (2004). Observing and Measuring Behavior in the Classroom: Tools and Techniques. *Helping Children at Home and School II: Handouts for Families and Educators*. National Association of School Psychologists.
For a quick review of the table of contents, go to:
http://www.nasponline.org/publications/booksproducts/hchs2.aspx

Helpful Websites:

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.