



Examples of Positive Behavioral Intervention Strategies

A child with challenging behavior who has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), should have positive behavioral interventions included to help reduce challenging behaviors and support the new behavioral skills to be learned through the IEP goals. These interventions should be specific strategies that are positive and proactive, and are not reactive and consequence-based. The following list suggests some different kinds of positive behavioral interventions that could be useful:

1. **Clear routines and expectations** that are posted and reviewed help children know what comes next in their school day, reducing anxiety or fear.
2. **Stop, Relax, and Think** strategy teaches children how to think about a problem and find a solution. Children learn the following steps:
 - a. Define the problem
 - b. Decide who “owns” the problem
 - c. Think of as many solutions as possible to solve the problem
 - d. Select a solution to try
 - e. Use the solution
 - f. Evaluate its success

After children understand the steps, role-play and practice can help the process become habit. Helping children to recognize their own response to stress (clenched hands, voice tone, etc.) may become part of the instruction needed to use this strategy effectively. Practicing and being successful with these steps can take time for children. Therefore, it is important to consider what kind of support a child may need that will help reinforce progress.

3. **Pre-arranged signals** can be used to let a child know when they are doing something that is not acceptable. A hand motion, a shake of the head or a colored card placed on a desk as the teacher moves through the room could alert the child without drawing attention to the child or the behavior. It is important to develop a signal that the child and teacher agree on using and for what purpose.
4. **Proximity control** means that a teacher or adult moves closer to the child in a gentle way. If the teacher does not get the child’s attention by using cues, then they may move closer to the student or give the lesson while standing near the child’s desk.
5. **Planned response method** is useful in stopping non-serious behaviors that are bothersome to other children or adults nearby.

For example, students who interrupt the class to attract the teacher’s attention usually are successful in getting the teachers to respond. Planned response method acknowledges that children’s challenging behaviors serve a purpose. If the purpose of that behavior is to gain adult attention, then not providing attention means that the behavior does not work. The behavior lessens over time and eventually disappears. Ignoring non-serious behavior is especially useful for parents when their child is having a tantrum for attention. Many adults find it difficult to ignore behaviors, especially if the behaviors interrupt what the adult is doing. Also, attention-seeking behaviors often get worse before they eventually go away.

Planned response method is not suitable for behaviors that are extremely disruptive. This method also may not work if other children laugh at the problem behaviors the adult is trying to ignore. Some behaviors, including

those that are unsafe or that include peer issues such as arguing, can grow quickly into more serious behaviors. It may not be possible to ignore these kinds of behaviors. The process of ignoring the behavior should **never** be used for unsafe behaviors. As children grow older and want attention more from their friends than from adults, the planned response method is less useful.

6. **Discipline privately.** Many children see it as a challenge when teachers attempt to discipline them in front of their peers. Children rarely lose these challenges, even when adults use negative consequences. Young people can gain stature from peers by publicly refusing to obey a teacher. A child is more likely to accept discipline if their peers are not watching the process.
7. **Find opportunities for the child to help others.** For example, a child who is using negative behaviors as a way to get out of class could be given the task of running an errand for the teacher to the front office. Peer involvement is another motivator for appropriate behavior. Finding times for the child who uses disruptive behavior to get attention from his classmates to help another student positively engages attention and can build rapport.
8. **Positive phrasing** lets children know the positive results for using appropriate behaviors. As simple as it sounds, this can be difficult. Teachers and parents are used to focusing on misbehavior. Warning children about a negative response to problem behaviors often seems easier than describing the positive impact of positive behaviors. Compare the difference between positive phrasing and negative phrasing:
Positive phrasing: “If you finish your reading by recess, we can all go outside together and play a game.”
Negative phrasing: “If you do not finish your reading by recess, you will have to stay inside until it’s done.”
9. **State the behavior you want to see.** For example, say “I like seeing how everyone lines up so quickly and quietly”, instead of “Stop bothering the other students in line.”
10. **Behavior shaping** acknowledges that not all children can do everything at 100 percent. If a child does not turn in papers daily, expecting that papers will be turned in 100 percent of the time is not realistic. By rewarding small gains and reinforcing these gains as they occur, children learn how to stick with a task and to improve the skill.
11. **Tangible, token, and activity reinforcers** are also effective ways to encourage and support appropriate behavior. Tangible reinforcers can be awards, edibles or objects. Token reinforcers are tokens or points given for appropriate behavior that can be exchanged for something of value. Activity reinforcers are probably the most effective and positive as they allow students to participate in preferred activities, usually with other students, which also builds in social reinforcement.

For additional information on positive behavior interventions, functional behavioral assessment as well as related topics, please contact:

PACER Center

pacer.org

Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

pbis.org

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu>

Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention (TACSEI)

<http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/index.htm>

See PACER’s companion handout, *What is a Functional Behavioral Assessment and How is it Used? An Overview for Parents* - <https://media.pacer.org/php/php-c215a.pdf>