

BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION IDEAS BY FUNCTION OF BEHAVIOR

Lists of sample interventions compiled by:
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Note: Universal Positive Behavior Support practices and systems should be in place before trying to determine appropriate individualized interventions. If informal efforts to provide function-based interventions are not successful, do a full functional behavioral assessment.

1. Student is trying to OBTAIN something through problem behavior

OBTAIN: Adult Attention, Adult Feedback, Adult Help

- Directly teach, model, and practice appropriate words/actions for getting adult attention
- Give prompts and pre-corrects as needed
- Strongly reinforce student when they use appropriate ways of seeking attention
- Be very consistent in following through with classroom expectations for getting teacher attention (i.e., don't repeatedly recognize those who call out if hand raising is an expectation)
- Schedule special times with teacher or other preferred adults (principal, custodian, specials teachers, volunteer, counselor, etc.)
- When you ARE giving attention, give full attention--listen carefully and maintain eye contact
- Give attention for anything the student is doing well (catch them being good!)
- Avoid letting student get attention through negative behaviors
- In addition to verbal recognition, give nonverbal attention/recognition: thumbs up, high fives, handshakes, smiles, winks, etc.
- Work at relationship building—show an interest in the student, give sincere compliments, find out about likes and dislikes, etc.
- Positive phone calls or notes sent home
- Have student write questions/concerns in a special notebook or journal for later review
- Send positive notes to student—encourage student to save them in a scrapbook
- Give attention before need arises
- Ask the student for help or opinion
- Give recognition and attention to students who are following expectations
- Restate classroom expectations related to getting attention without addressing the student directly ("I'll be calling on someone who is raising their hand")
- Leave student a note such as: "I can talk with you at 1:30 today"
- Give gestures and nonverbal cues to signal the student to wait for attention, then make sure you follow through
- Make sure tasks and assignments are within ability level, so student won't need frequent adult attention and assistance
- Set up systems to help student organize—daily schedule, task check-off chart, color coding, etc.—these will minimize need for adult assistance
- Give student a certain number of colored sticks, cubes, or other objects that represent opportunities for getting teacher attention—when all objects are gone, student has to wait until a designated time to get more attention or assistance (this can help a student "tune in" to their frequent requests for attention, if this behavior has become habitual)
- Directly teach problem solving skills, so student can solve problems without adult assistance
- Keep a folder at student's desk filled with activities and work pages that can be done independently while waiting for help

OBTAIN: Peer Attention, Social Interaction With Peers

- Directly teach appropriate social interaction skills through role-playing, skits, demonstrations, small group social skills lessons, etc.—practice in context, and reinforce when skills are used
- Set up opportunities for special activities with peers: game, special project, extra recess, etc.
- Ask student to help a classmate with assignment, if appropriate
- Ask student to serve as mentor or tutor for a younger student, if appropriate
- Allow student to select special fun activity for class
- Have “cool” older student serve as a mentor
- Applause or cheer from class for special achievements
- Use a special button, ribbon, hat, necklace, etc. that designates positive behavior or special attribute—must be something that is desirable to all students
- Increase activities involving peer interactions
- Cooperative learning groups (after setting clear expectations for the groups regarding inclusion and participation of all group members)
- Use buddy system
- Assign high profile jobs or duties that give status (class monitor, line leader, taking care of class pet, reading school-wide announcements, making student the class “expert” in an area of strength, working at school store, etc.)
- Teach all students about including and accepting others—strongly reinforce those behaviors
- Make sure everyone in the class knows what to do when attention-seeking students are annoying or upsetting them—how to ignore, what words to use, when to get teacher help, etc.
- If negative peer attention is reinforcing to the student, don’t give negative whole-group consequences for the misbehavior of individuals or small groups
- Monitor student’s social interactions—to get information about causes of problems, and/or to protect the student or others

OBTAIN: Objects or Activities

- Directly teach the student how to appropriately ask for what they want/need
- Directly teach students the skill of how to wait
- Allow students to earn preferred objects or activities as reinforcement—ensure they don’t get what they want through inappropriate behavior
- Create visual schedule that incorporates time for special activities
- If/then: Access to preferred activities comes after less-preferred tasks are finished (for some students this may need to be in the form of a chart or represented by pictures)
- Make sure fun time is built into the day
- Make sure preferred objects aren’t easily obtained by stealing

OBTAIN: Positive Sensory Input or Positive Physiological Sensation

- Directly teach the student how to recognize when they need a break, movement, etc., and teach them how to meet those needs appropriately
- Provide opportunities for movement or extra activity (schedule in walks, stretching, mini tramp, riding on a stationary bike, doing errands around the school, erasing white boards, etc.)
- Allow to work or listen standing up
- Have two work areas available—student can move between them
- Provide non-disruptive items to handle, such as squeeze ball, “fidget”, thera-putty
- Follow OT/PT recommendations for sensory diet, weighted vest, pencil grip, approved items to chew, seating modifications, etc.
- Allow student to have water bottle—add a straw if student needs something to chew

OBTAIN: Positive Sensory Input or Positive Physiological Sensation, contd.

- Provide “hands on” activities and manipulatives
- Allow student to chew gum if this helps with concentration
- Schedule nap or rest times if needed
- Allow seating options based on need (rocking chair, bean bag, seat cushion, etc.)
- Allow student to access preferred scents
- Use edible reinforcers (after checking with parents), but pair with a praise statement and gradually work toward reducing or eliminating reliance on edibles
- Incorporate use of different senses and different learning styles into lessons

2. Student is trying to AVOID something or ESCAPE through problem behavior

AVOID: Adult Attention or Adult Feedback

- Maintain positive attitude and encouragement, but beware of too much cheerleading
- Teach and reinforce accurate self-monitoring and self-evaluation
- Make sure your feedback/attention is in the form of at least 5 positives for every correction
- Be clear, concise, and brief when giving directions
- Avoid multiple requests, lecturing, or “nagging”
- Use visual cues to minimize verbal interactions—some students tune out teacher talk
- Give written feedback instead of verbal face-to-face feedback, but gradually build skills in the area of accepting verbal feedback
- Give private praise or reinforcement if student doesn’t accept public positive reinforcement, but gradually teach the skill of accepting public reinforcement
- Honor student preferences for proximity, touch, etc., but teach the student how to handle uncomfortable situations in a socially acceptable way
- After giving a direction or feedback, give student space and time—don’t be drawn into an argument
- Work at building a positive relationship with the student, but know that creative strategies may be necessary—some students are very wary of adult interest and attention
- Provide written or visual schedule to minimize verbal directions
- Provide choices
- Point to a rule on the classroom rule chart rather than giving a verbal reminder
- When student is having problems, make reference to the rules, the student’s behavior contract expectations, the student’s behavior plan goals, etc., rather than making it personal
- Convey the message that mistakes are okay

AVOID: Peer Attention or Social Interaction with Peers

- Directly teach strategies, words, etc. to use when others are bothering or upsetting them
- Directly teach appropriate social interaction and play skills (if students are avoiding contact because of skill deficits)
- Allow alternatives to outdoor recesses or other situations (cafeteria, passing periods, etc.) that involve lots of noisy, unstructured contact with large numbers of students—gradually teach skills and build tolerance for handling these situations
- Avoid grouping/seating arrangements that force student into close proximity with those he/she has difficulty with—gradually teach skills and build tolerance for working with all peers
- Strongly communicate and enforce zero tolerance for bullying, harassment, teasing, name-calling, etc., in the school, classroom, and playground

AVOID: Situations, Activities, or Work

- Directly teach, practice, and reinforce acceptable words, actions, or behavior for students to use when needing to escape from a task or leave an uncomfortable situation (“I want to be by myself for a while”, “I need a break”)
- Teach students several acceptable ways to get help with a task, and reinforce them when they access help instead of immediately giving up
- Give assignments within ability level (don’t make assumptions about abilities, use assessment)
- Differentiate instruction
- Work at finding a reasonable balance between consistency and flexibility, in order to be responsive to students with significant and/or variable needs
- Let student choose time away, instead of escaping through misbehavior
- Acknowledge fears and frustrations without letting the student use them as an excuse
- Use timer to define work times and breaks
- Allow student to have alternative options for tasks or activities as appropriate
- Provide information about upcoming events (review schedule in a.m. and before transitions)
- Celebrate student strengths and abilities
- Teach class about multiple intelligences and different ways to be “smart”
- Directly teach the skill of “trying when it’s hard”, reinforce for trying
- Teach positive self-talk
- Demonstrate your faith in the student in as many ways possible
- Increase activities that ensure student success
- Teach class to honor diverse abilities/needs, and enforce zero tolerance for teasing
- Make sure interventions for sensory/physiological needs are in place
- Reduce or remove task demands initially, followed by gradually increasing demands once student is achieving success
- Teach the skill “say okay and do it”
- Watch for signs of stress or anxiety—intervene early
- Make an “chill-out” card for the student, and outline criteria for use
- Sandwich non-preferred tasks or activities in between more desirable tasks and activities

AVOID: Sensory Input or Unpleasant Physiological Sensation

- Directly teach strategies for dealing with unpleasant sensations
- Ear plugs or ear phones (to escape unpleasant auditory stimulation)
- Quiet place to work
- Study carrel
- Seating alternatives other than typical student desk & chair
- Individual student “office” with tri-fold board to block out stimuli
- Alternatives to noisy, chaotic situations or activities
- Allow sunglasses, visor, hoodie (to escape bright lights or visual stimulation)
- Advance warning of fire alarms, loud noises, construction, etc.
- Provide snacks or drinks if student may be hungry or thirsty
- Passing periods/lunch during less crowded or noisy times
- School/class emphasis on honoring “quiet zones” throughout the school
- If medication is prescribed for the student, and administration seems inconsistent, seek advice and assistance from relevant school personnel
- Have areas of non-fluorescent lighting available
- Make it a school goal to reduce noise in the lunchroom
- Provide clear routines and extra structure as needed