

DENISE

Denise is an 8 year old, 2nd grade student served in a self contained special education classroom with 9 peers of various disabilities and cognitive skills. Denise has a diagnosis of Autism.

Problem Behavior:

Denise exhibits problem behavior which escalates from muttering 4 letter words under her breath, to rocking back and forth, to spitting and biting her hand. Without adult intervention, her behavior frequently escalates to screaming, dropping to the floor and head banging. These behaviors are hypothesized as serving a PROTEST function (Her face looks angry and is often red. Her voice quality is high pitched and she frequently moans and looks unhappy.) These behaviors have occurred in structured and unstructured activities, in multiple settings. The team is not sure what she may be protesting.

Identified skill deficit requiring teaching:

Denise inconsistently uses 1-2 word utterances to make her needs and wants known. On mornings that she arrives at school looking very tired she attempts to avoid contact with adults and peers. On these days she is especially likely to use problem behavior and does not readily verbalize needs and wants. She also uses problem behavior on days she does NOT appear tired. Sometimes she does express needs and wants in the earlier stages if an adult says, "What do you want?"

Physical Setting (e.g., noise, crowding, temperature)

The classroom is physically small, but adequate space for whole class activities and individual desks is present. The room is relatively quiet and the teacher emphasizes "inside voice" with the other student. Denise has not demonstrated sensory avoidant behaviors for sounds in class, but has done so in the large cafeteria.

Social Setting: (interaction patterns, with and around the student)

Denise's teacher and 1 classroom aide are soft spoken and frequently affectionately touch students. All students respond positively, including Denise, unless she has already begun the problem behavior or it is a day in which she appears very tired when she arrives at school. One aide has a loud voice and moves very rapidly. Denise does not have more difficulty with him than others.

Activities: (activities/curriculum match learner needs?)

Denise's IEP focuses on functional reading and math. Worksheets are commonly used, employing "Touch Math" in this classroom. During circle time, Denise often enjoys the music, but after 15 minutes of a 25 minute circle, will sometimes begin problem behavior. If removed, she typically does not escalate further, but she also does not appear to purposefully use the behavior to escape. Activities are given in sequence but no container organization system (series of numbered trays or folders, rolling charts with sequenced drawers, etc.) is used.

Scheduling Factors: (timing, sequencing and transition issues)

Denise often has to wait for 5+ minutes as the teacher prepares new activities, collects work, or transitions to lunch, recess, etc. Problem behavior is sometimes seen at this time.

No use of an individualized picture schedule has been observed, though there is a generic picture-with-symbol schedule in the front corner of the room.

The schedule of the day does not intersperse Denise's desired activities (computer touch screen games, making marks on the chalkboard, watching a specific video) with less desired activities. Desired activities usually occur back-to-back at the end of the day.

Degree of Independence: (reinforcement intervals appropriate to foster independence)

Denise prefers the close presence of a specific female aide. She pats this aide on the leg, smiles and hugs frequently. The aide frequently smiles and sometimes hugs. She is quite patient and is often able to get Denise to do "work" she has refused previously, or refused with other adults. Problem behavior has occurred one-on-one with this aide as well, but not as frequently.

Degree of Participation: (group size, location, and participation parameters)

Denise frequently works alone, but will tolerate some reciprocal games (UNO) with one adult and a few peers if an adult is present. She enjoys circle time most of the time and delights in identifying peers names as well as putting the date card on the calendar. She used to participate in assemblies, but parents believe she does not tolerate this well, so she now remains in the room.

Social Interaction: (social communication needs match instruction and opportunities)

Denise rarely initiates interactions beyond initial greeting of a familiar adult. Adults are working on tolerating reciprocal interactions. One non-disabled 12 year old student seeks her out at recess and Denise now anticipates and shrieks with delight when she appears.

Degree of Choice (amount of choice making and negotiation present in the environment)

Denise is allowed to choose activities following a problem behavior and during free time. All other activities are required and no choices are given. She has no negotiation skills as of yet.

Task 1: Compare these findings with your internalized knowledge base on environmental supports and/or see Environmental Supports article and/or Autism considerations. Discuss with your team.

Task 2: Prepare your analysis describing: What is IN the environment or MISSING in the environment that needs changing to potentially remove or reduce the student's need to use the problem behavior?

Task 3: Develop your recommended environmental supports and changes for team consideration based on your analysis.

ADAM

Adam is an 11 year old, 5th grade student served 60% in a self contained special education classroom this year. There are 15 peers of various disabilities and cognitive skills in the class. Adam has a learning disability in reading and AD/HD. He reads at an approximate 3.5 grade level, but is making good progress. Last year Adam was in a general education class for all but 35% of the school day. This year he is in general education environments for P.E., music, and math.

Problem Behavior:

Adam will sometimes throw his work on the floor, swear under his breathe and state that the “work is stupid and I’m not going to do this baby work!” If pressed, Adam will sometimes run out of the room crying or screaming “F_ck you!” as he departs. This has occurred approximately 5 times per week for the last six weeks he has been in this class. At other times, he is cooperative and successful. This behavior only occurs in the special education classroom. The principal has stated that when Adam’s behavior is under control for four weeks, the IEP team should meet to discuss more time in general education class with an accommodation plan for his reading deficits, because he obviously prefers that environment. She has told the team that “Adam has to earn the right to be in the general education class for more time by showing more good behavior in the special day class.”

Physical Setting (e.g., noise, crowding, temperature)

The classroom is physically small, but adequate space for whole class activities and individual desks are present. The room is relatively quiet and the teacher emphasizes “inside voice.”

Social Setting: (interaction patterns, with and around the student)

Adam’s teacher and classroom aide are soft spoken and friendly. All students respond positively to the adults, including Adam. Adam has no friends in this class and prefers to socialize with his last year’s playmates.

Activities: (activities/curriculum match learner needs?)

Adam is making excellent progress in reading in this environment, though seatwork has been an intermittent occasion for problem behavior. Adam is the only student at this reading level, so lessons are one-on-one. Adam’s teacher is using the grade level social studies and science texts, but simplifies worksheets and orally reads the material to four students.

Scheduling Factors: (timing, sequencing and transition issues)

The classroom has a clear sequence, posted on the board, with smooth transitions between activities.

Degree of Independence: (reinforcement intervals appropriate to foster independence)

Adam will frequently request adult assistance on worksheets, but at other times asks to be left alone to complete the work, stating, "I'm not a baby! I can do this!"

Degree of Participation: (group size, location, and participation parameters)

Adam usually works alone, but will tolerate reciprocal games on the computer if the teacher pairs him with another student. He enjoys classroom jobs, especially taking attendance to the office.

Social Interaction: (social communication needs match instruction and opportunities)

Adam complains about the lack of friends in this class, and that the other students are "not fun to be with!"

Degree of Choice (amount of choice making and negotiation present in the environment)

Adam's teacher has excellent negotiation skills and regularly offers choice of activities to the students. Adam frequently expresses a strong opinion on his wants and needs, but usually will accept negotiation.

Task 1: Discuss the politics of this situation. Do we face this frequently? What are the best ways of proceeding in a case like this?

Task 2: Prepare your analysis describing: What is IN the environment or MISSING in the environment that needs changing to potentially remove or reduce the student's need to use the problem behavior?

Task 3: Describe your recommended environmental supports and what you would propose for team consideration.