

Designing Behavior Interventions to Address the Needs of Students with Disabilities or Characteristics

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Consider these Factors¹:

- How the current environment supports the problem behavior, does not yet support alternative behavior(s)
- Purpose and function of problem behavior for the student
- Reason problem behavior continues
- Is there an alternative behavior to replace the problem behavior, meeting the same function; can the student do this yet?
- Are there skill deficits? Methods of teaching what is missing?
- Strategies and curricular components for teaching any new behaviors?
- Strategies for maintaining new behavior?
- Environmental changes necessary to remove students' need to use this behavior?

AD/HD

Behavior Support for Individuals with AD/HD

- often need strategies to maintain attention to task, inhibit impulsive responding, organize time, space, and materials
- often need environmental structuring to aid poor goal setting and flexible problem solving
- often missing necessary social skills, need instruction
- often punished by peers, need adult structuring to elicit on-going, appropriate peer reinforcement
- often need frequent reinforcement for rule following
- often need active, hands-on learning opportunities with tasks structured into small units to aid sense of accomplishment

AD/HD Potential Behaviors Impeding Learning to Consider in Support Planning

- Impulsivity
 - not raising hand
 - rushing through work
 - responding inappropriately to adult correction
- Distractibility/low “focused attending” skills
 - difficulty staying on task
 - low work completion rates
 - planning deficits
 - disturbing others

¹Although all behavior support must be individualized, experience has shown that certain features are especially important to consider when specific characteristics or disabilities are present

- Poor modulation of arousal system
 - falls asleep
 - struggles to maintain focus
- Poor strategy formation to complete complex tasks
 - poor ability to break up tasks in chunks
 - poor sequencing of actions to meet goal
 - poor selection of behavior alternatives/low flexibility
- Hyperactivity
 - difficulty staying in seat
 - bounces from task to task
 - body movements disturb others
- Feedback deficits
 - failure to take corrective actions/based on input from peers and adults
 - active resistance to rules/changing rules to fit personal desires rather than to enhance group cohesion
- Low frustration tolerance
- Difficulty with delaying gratification
- Low understanding of elapsed time

TOURETTE SYNDROME

Behavior Support for Individuals with Tourette Syndrome, Obsessive/Compulsive Disorders

- often need accommodations similar to AD/HD above
- often need opportunity for “time away” (student initiated) when in a disruptive, repetitive cycle
- often need output accommodations for frequently occurring written language difficulties (oral/projects, etc.)
- often need desensitization techniques to overcome fears, interventions for anxiety control and obsessive compulsive thinking and behavior
- often responds to “shared controls” and negotiations to obtain preferred activities in exchange for completing non-preferred activities.

Tourette Syndrome Potential Behaviors Impeding Learning

- All of AD/HD behaviors potentially present
- Exhibits cycles of repetitive, disruptive behaviors
 - sounds, words, body actions
- Written language task refusals/“Developmental Output Failure”
- Difficulty with “divided attention”/shifting attention
 - can’t stop task to get initial or further teacher direction
 - can’t attend to two things simultaneously
- Cycles of irrational fears
- Cycles of obsessive or compulsive behaviors
 - perseverates on topic/theme
- Resistance to non-preferred tasks

INDIVIDUALS SOCIALIZED TO GROUPS WHO VALUE AGGRESSION

Can include students with or without eligibility as emotionally disturbed

Behavior Support for Individuals Socialized to Groups Who Value Aggression

- often respond well to mentoring, unconditional positive regard
- need to achieve acclaim through alternative methods; alliances with teacher & successful, positive model peers (if available and highly regarded) to protect from humiliation and to offer an alternative world view and hope for the future
- need to be educated by authoritative teachers (not authoritarian, laissez faire or democratic)
- need “time away” options when frustration tolerance is low
- often need highly structured environments with contingent access to reinforcement for exhibiting social skills which are specifically taught

Potential Behaviors Impeding Learning for Individuals Socialized to Groups Who Value Aggression

- Dresses and acts like idealized group leader(s)
- Uses belligerent language or swearing in low-stress situations to communicate lack of commitment to school tasks/school personnel
- Fails to believe a teacher “likes me ok,” assumes teacher lack of commitment
- Failure to complete assignments or strive for success
- Overreacts to peers
- Strives to achieve social dominance or higher rungs in social ladder via “acting tough” to all
- Breaks rules to achieve peer group status
 - truancy, property destruction, aggression
- Breaks social mores to achieve status: unprovoked “meanness” toward younger, smaller, less dominant peers
- Fear of humiliation
- Low frustration tolerance/low coping skills

AUTISM

Behavior Support for Individuals with Autism

- need a functional communication system appropriate to developmental level (consider use of a picture exchange for desired objects and activities if non-verbal and developmentally 2 years or older)
- often need task (pacing), time (schedule instruction) space, interaction structuring
- often need adults to structure environments to modulate sensory arousal systems and alter conditions depending on the arousal level of the child at a specific time
- often need physical activity interspersed with other activity
- often requires “functional” curriculum, functional application of learned academic material
- often need help understanding social world
 - social story instruction
 - social script instruction
- often need “time away”, access to preferred activity interspersed throughout the day
- often need direct one-on-one instruction for a new skill, then carefully structured follow-through throughout activities of the day to assist with generalization
- often learns rules through visual prompts (icons, words) better than through verbal instruction
- often copies inappropriate behavior readily; needs access to good models

Potential Behaviors Impeding Learning in Individuals with Autism

- Difficulty shifting attention/shifting tasks
- Low understanding of elapsed time
- Resistance to non-preferred tasks
- Poor modulation of sensory input
 - under or over-responds to sight/smell/movement/sounds
- Communicates via behavior--uses no or few words functionally to express needs and words to negotiate
- Restricted range of interests/restricted behavior repertoire
- Upset over changes in environment
 - scheduling changes
 - the way other people act/speak
 - materials
 - changes of routines for performing familiar tasks
- Overlaps with Tourette's Syndrome:
 - fears, cycles, resistance

LEARNING DISABILITIES

Behavior Support for Individuals with Learning Disabilities

- often need protection from humiliation
- often need self-advocacy training
- often need supportive, rich, frequent reinforcement for real accomplishments
- often need instruction on what is/is NOT impeding academic progress (e.g., You are not "stupid.")
- often need extensive curriculum accommodations to facilitate "success"
- often respond well to mentoring, unconditional positive regard
- sometimes need social skill instruction

Potential Behaviors Impeding Learning in Individuals with Learning Disabilities

- "Global Deficits" belief system
- Low understanding of specific disability
- Low skills in explaining disability to others
- Low self-advocacy skills
 - resists asking for needed accommodations
- Gives up easily, fails to anticipate success
- Fails to organize materials and time
- Fear of humiliation
- Low time management skills

LOW SOCIAL COMPETENCE

Behavior Support for Individuals with “Low Social Competence”

(LD/ADHD/ED, etc)

- often benefit from specific social skills instruction to address the exact missing skill
- often benefit from peer “coaches” of high status who mentor the student through difficulties in work groups in class, in structured sports at recess
- often benefit from classroom meeting model in which difficulties are addressed in a manner that allows peer support to be evident
- often benefit from teacher helping peers understand the student and provide support through ‘circle of friends’, ‘pit crews’ who mentor the student
- often benefit from structured classrooms with specific posted rules on how to share materials
- often benefit from therapeutic debriefing using strategies such as “My Inappropriate Behavior”
- often benefit from techniques such as “Social Stories” (explaining others’ perspectives) and “Social Scripting” (what to say or do in specific situations)

Potential Behaviors Impeding Learning in Individuals with “Low Social Competence”

(LD/ADHD/ED, etc)

- Uses inappropriate social interaction initiations
- Isolates self
- Fear of failure and/or peer feedback
- Withdraws from interactions
- Difficulty sharing materials
- Approaches socially distant groups for interaction resulting in rejection
- Fails to make validating comments to others or to take actions that support viewpoints of others
- Fails to negotiate for group consensus
- Failure to understand another’s perspective