

**“CHALLENGING STUDENT” CASE: WHAT WENT WRONG?
2nd grader a principal has recommended for expulsion
(excerpts from a recent email from the teacher)**

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Case Background:

A 7 year old boy, “Challenging Student (CS),” is a 2nd grader with an IEP for articulation problems served in general education. In the current incident, he told Ms. Teacher: "You are ruining my life making me do all these worksheets! You are making my brain hurt from teaching, teaching, teaching, learning, learning, learning!" He then threw the workbook on the floor. Ms. Teacher then made him pick it up, so he began ripping up the book. She required him to then move to the "red chair" and his behavior worsened, and this culminated in teacher injury while trying to keep him in the chair, followed by teacher injury while moving CS to the office.

Instructions for Activity: Read the following and silently identify problems you observe. Pay special attention to bold areas:

This is the email (edited for confidentiality) from Ms. Teacher to the Special Education Director:

“My class discipline program is a Card Pulling Program. It allows the students to visually be aware of the choices they are making and see the possible positive and negative consequences they face throughout the day. Every day is a new day and the student has the opportunity to correct their behavior and end up on a positive note if they started out with problems. Before the students clip is moved down such as in CS's case, I will give a couple warnings. If the behavior continues, I will ask the student to move their clip down. This is supposed to be designed to redirect the student. In CS's case it was a short term solution that eventually stopped working. When a student gets to Teacher Choice it is up to me to determine the consequence.

With most students, I would take away recess. In CS's case, we would have a discussion about what behavior he is displaying and what he could do to prevent his poor behavior. **I would allow him to vent (yelling) his feelings to help release the anger** and then request that he take deep breaths and get a drink of water. He would do this and cooperate. One time I had to escort him to the empty classroom because a parent was present when he began to throw a fit. I asked him to retell the story we were reading and he did so yelling the entire summary. It was perfectly recited. I used it as a productive outlet for his frustrations. CS has also been invited to work at my desk if he becomes too much of a distraction. Sometimes he was able to calm down and complete his work, and other times he chose to just sit and pout.

If CS crumpled up work out of frustration the assignment was sent home to be completed with his parents. CS's parents were very cooperative in making sure CS did his best and returned the completed assignment the following day.

The red chair is a leather recliner I have in the reading area. I read stories to the students in it, students that write stories outside of class can share them in it, and if students are enjoying books in the reading center, they may sit in the chair. It is a positive place for all students. This last episode with CS became very volatile. **So in order to keep the class safe after he threw his notebook right before lunch recess**, I told him to sit in the red chair away from the rest of the class and in a safe area for him until I excused the other students. (**Note: Apparently he went to the red chair with no complaints.**)

When the classroom was cleared, I pulled a chair next to him to discuss his behavior. **He was so angry that he was foaming out of his mouth. I tried to talk calmly but sternly.** When I stood up to leave him alone he decided he was going to leave. **I told him to sit down and I guarded him from getting back up. He scraped down my arms with his finger nails and tried to punch me in the face. I attempted to hold his hands down.** He got loose and grabbed my lanyard to try and choke me. I told him to stop hurting me. He said he wanted to hurt me and he wanted to kill me. I then grabbed his hand and escorted him to the office. He fought me all the way there. (*Note not in this email description: CS fell to the ground during the removal and was kicking and screaming to be released.*) I hope this helps you in evaluating CS's situation. Please contact me with questions regarding this matter." ---Ms. Teacher

Instructions: Discuss the following with your partner(s):

1. Reactive Strategy Problems?

(Review the 4 phases and discuss what was present and not present:

1. Prompt to replacement behavior; 2. Handle Problem Safely; 3. Debrief;
4. Consequences (if needed or required)

- Does Catharsis work? Is Ms. Teacher using this strategy?
- Was Ms. Teacher's actions a "restraint?"

If so, what went wrong?

2. What was the Function of CS's Behaviors?

Original behavior-throwing of book; then, tearing up of book; then, attempt to leave the chair; then, verbal threats; then, lanyard grab and choke; then, scratching; then, kicking

3. What are Suspected Environmental Issues for this 2nd grader?

4. Should CS be Expelled? Suspended? Other disciplinary actions? Why or why not?

5. Consultation Issues: Describe how you will inform Ms. Teacher about what went wrong

6. Behavior planning issues: What does "Challenging Student" need?

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1. **“You are ruining my life making me do all these worksheets! You are making my brain hurt from teaching, teaching, teaching, learning, learning, learning!”**
DBW: I suspect the teacher is over relying on worksheets, which is proving challenging to this student. An environmental assessment is needed to determine the appropriateness of the instructional strategies not just for this student, but for all students in this class.

2. **“He then threw the workbook on the floor.” Ms. Teacher then made him pick it up, so he began ripping up the book.**
DBW: Ms. Teacher did not “read” his behavior as a task termination and attempted to return the student to the task. His tearing up of the workbook should be viewed as a further “reject/protest/escape” function.

3. **She required him to then move to the "red chair" and his behavior worsened, and this culminated in teacher injury while trying to keep him in the chair, followed by teacher injury while moving CS to the office.**
DBW: Ms. Teacher escalated a minor problem to a major problem, applied “restraint” while holding him in the red chair and applied “restraint” while taking him to the office.

4. **“My class discipline program is a Card Pulling Program.”**
DBW: I suspect Ms. Teacher is focusing her efforts on punishing undesired behaviors using a response cost system rather than focusing on earning reinforcers for desired behavior.

5. **In CS's case it was a short term solution that eventually stopped working.**
DBW: Ms. Teacher has not yet had the support to identify CS as needing an additional individualized approach to shape his behavior. However, if further environmental assessment determines worksheets are a primary instructional approach, the entire environment and teaching practices need alteration, not simply addressing CS’s protest behavior.

6. **I would allow him to vent (yelling) his feelings to help release the anger.**
DBW: Ms. Teacher has not yet been made aware of the research on catharsis as an intervention. Bandura (1971) and others have demonstrated that catharsis for aggression increases aggression rather than decreasing. This practice must be changed.

7. **I asked him to retell the story we were reading and he did so yelling the entire summary. It was perfectly recited.**

DBW: CS appears to be academically capable, but the classroom activities are not working for this student. Also, debriefing with a student must be timed with his return to a calm state. You do not debrief or attempt this activity with an agitated child.

8. **CS has also been invited to work at my desk if he becomes too much of a distraction. Sometimes he was able to calm down and complete his work, and other times he chose to just sit and pout.**

DBW: Ms. Teacher is making efforts to personalize approaches with CS, but it would appear she has not yet used positive reinforcement, nor choice-making. She waits until a problem is present, and then reacts, rather than proactively setting up a system of support for CS.

9. **If CS crumpled up work out of frustration the assignment was sent home to be completed with his parents. "CS"'s parents were very cooperative in making sure "CS" did his best and returned the completed assignment the following day.**

DBW: A consultant may wish to interview the parent on strategies they use to get completion of the task, and whether they are essentially doing the work for CS.

10. **So in order to keep the class safe after he threw his notebook right before lunch recess, I told him to sit in the red chair away from the rest of the class and in a safe area for him until I excused the other students. (Note: Apparently he went to the red chair with no complaints.)**

DBW: Throwing a notebook does not present a safety challenge. It is interesting that CS complied and moved to the red chair. If a true safety issue were present, this compliance would not likely be readily attained.

11. **When the classroom was cleared, I pulled a chair next to him to discuss his behavior. He was so angry that he was foaming out of his mouth. I tried to talk calmly but sternly.**

DBW: I believe the students were going to recess. Ms. Teacher describes the removal as "classroom cleared" I believe to communicate she believes this is a safety issue. Stern talking with a very upset student is mistimed communication. This student needs a calm, low toned, supportive voice. He is not ready to debrief until he is calm and ready, regardless of voice quality used. Ms. Teacher omits any reference to her supportive behavior; therefore I would conclude that she needs assistance in learning how to give unconditional positive regard, even to an escalated child that has been troublesome in the past.

12. When I stood up to leave him alone he decided he was going to leave. I told him to sit down and I guarded him from getting back up. He scraped down my arms with his finger nails and tried to punch me in the face. I attempted to hold his hands down. He got loose and grabbed my lanyard to try and choke me. I told him to stop hurting me. He said he wanted to hurt me and he wanted to kill me.

DBW: Ms. Teacher's attempt to talk with him sternly possibly led to his attempts to escape. Ms. Teacher needed other supportive interactions from the very beginning to avoid this outcome. There are less restrictive interventions than "holding his hands down." This action led to the verbal threats and his attempts to flee a problem situation. I do not believe "restraint" was necessary.

13. I then grabbed his hand and escorted him to the office. He fought me all the way there. (Note not in this email description: CS fell to the ground during the removal and was kicking and screaming to be released.)

DBW: This is not a safe transport method authorized by any nationally recognized crisis intervention instruction program. This is an example of a problem behavior escalating following failure of the initial reactive strategy. I believe there was no reason to attempt to escort CS out of the room during this episode. Going to the office with Ms. Teacher would require CS to be in a calm state, with no physical restraint employed.

1. Reactive Strategy Problems?

- **1. Prompt to replacement behavior – DBW:** No functionally equivalent behavior has been taught or permitted
- **2. Handle Problem Safely – DBW:** The teacher was injured in large part due to a failure to develop positive programming, misunderstanding interventions (catharsis), and I suspect a less than positive interaction style with CS. She needs consultant support either from her school team, or a district support staff member to develop more appropriate interactions.
- **3. Debrief – DBW:** Ms. Teacher attempts to debrief while CS is still agitate. This needs alteration
- **4. Consequences (if needed or required)**
 - **DBW:** Catharsis does not reduce aggression. Ms. Teacher is using this intervention.
 - **DBW:** Ms. Teacher's attempts to restrain for non-compliance directly caused this escalation.

2. What was the Function of CS's Behaviors?

DBW: All behaviors communicated protest, escape, reject. Initially CS was protesting his perception of too many worksheets required, then he protested being required to return to the task by ripping up the workbook, then he protested being restrained in the chair, then he protested being physically restrained on the way to the office.

3. What are Suspected Environmental Issues for this 2nd grader?

DBW: Environmental Assessment is likely to yield further information about the inadequate environment's role on his behavior. Time, Space, Materials, Interactions should be examined and are likely to support an over reliance on worksheets for skill practice, possibly too much time devoted to independent seatwork, and less than warm and supportive interactions between teacher and student.

4. Should CS be Expelled?

DBW: He is a second grader in need of supports. The situation would not likely have escalated with more appropriate teacher responses. However, a teacher was injured and there will be some issues for administration to address in allaying fears other staff members may have about their "protection" from "dangerous students." He is likely to have received a suspension in this process.

5. Consultation Issues

DBW: Consultation involves reinforcing in the direction of change. Ms. Teacher should be congratulated in her attempts to change the Card Program somewhat for CS, and her use of her desk for his work. She should be informed about catharsis being shown to escalate the problem, and it should be admitted that additional supports are necessary to help CS. A school team, with district support as needed, should address development of a full Behavior Support Plan for CS.

6. Behavior Planning Issues: What does "Challenging Student" need?

DBW: CS needs us to recognize and honor his task termination behavior. We need to teach him to use a "not now, later" card to terminate a task as a Functionally Equivalent Replacement Behavior. He needs individualized contingent access to desired reinforcers for completing tasks to encourage general positive behaviors. The environment will probably require adjustments to encourage learning and demonstrating the knowledge acquired in more engaging ways. The five basic human needs may not be readily available in this classroom—Fun, Freedom, Empowerment, Belonging, (Physical). His plan should assure some self-determination, access to fun activities throughout the day, which can be the lessons themselves. Correction, redirection should not interfere with his membership in the group so that he maintains a sense of class membership (Belonging). It is very likely that others will begin rejecting him due to their observations of teacher interactions with CS.