

Progressive Response System to Problem Behavior: A Systematic, Equitable, Relationship-preserving Approach

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Key Concept: A progressive system of responding to problem behavior that includes disciplinary consequences and office support is an important aspect of an effective school-based service delivery model in addition to proactive, positive supports. This is consistent with RTI and PBIS practices and inclusive of all students throughout the tiers of support. The purpose of establishing a progressive response system is for all staff to adopt a common approach to reacting to problem behavior with the goal of correcting behavior in a fair, respectful manner that is likely to preserve the relationship with the student.

Key Concept: The office referral is NOT a classroom management plan for the teacher; rather, it is the beginning of a solution-focused process to aid the student and teacher in restoring student engagement in learning.

❖ Discipline Definition and Practice

Discipline is the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior, using punishment to correct disobedience: it is also defined as the practice of identifying a rule or code that has been broken, then applying a punishment procedure.

❖ Office Support Definition and Practice

Office support is a problem-solving process that consists of using solution-focused practices, in combination with disciplinary and other consequences, to identify the roots of the problem and implement effective solutions that decrease the future likelihood of behavior and preserve the relationship with the student.

Three Preparation Steps for Office Support

1. Assist staff in defining problem behaviors in order to establish common language and consistency of practices. Determine which behaviors sometimes require office and which behaviors always require office support. This may take more than one staff meeting to generate consensus. Example definitions for problem behaviors are below.
 - Dangerous behaviors: must be referred
 - Potentially-dangerous behaviors: unless diffused in 2 minutes, send to office
 - Disruptive behaviors: use PROMPT, but if unresponsive to PROMPT, send to office
 - Mildly disruptive behaviors: use full prompt. Very unlikely behavior will require office investigation
 - Irritating behaviors: use PROMPT, but if chronic and unresponsive, may use office support to further identify roots of the problem
2. Develop an office support form that allows teachers to check off the steps that have been completed, identify the specific category of problem behavior, identify other variables that may be helpful in the office support process, such as the function of the problem behavior (i.e., to get something like attention or to avoid something like difficult academic work) or whether the staff person reflected on whether the problem could be the result of a cultural misunderstanding or mismatch. (See attached document)
3. Teach the students the problem behavior categories along with the behavioral expectations (e.g., Safe, Respectful, and Responsible). Make sure the students are fully aware of what are considered problem behaviors and the potential consequences for exhibiting them.

PART ONE: The Foundation of an Effective Progressive Response System

In order for a progressive response system to work effectively, schools need to implement foundational supports. Without the following foundational supports in place, research has shown that many students will likely exhibit behavioral problems and there will be very little reason for students to self-manage and correct their behavior. The foundational supports are:

- First, educators need to develop strong positive relationships with all students, as this relationship makes students more likely to behave well and to correct their own behavior. Often the students who exhibit problem behavior are the students with whom educators have to work the hardest to build a strong positive relationship
- Second, proactive classroom management procedures must be in place: educators greeting students at the door, five positive acknowledgements to every one correction (known as 5 to 1 ratios) for all students, a well organized classroom with engaging instruction, periodic re-teaching of the 3-5 core behavior expectations (e.g. Safe, Respectful, and Responsible), and a positive reinforcement system in the classroom.
- Lastly, educators must be aware of and reflect on their own emotional reaction to the problem in the classroom. They should reflect on how their decision-making process in the moment either helped to diffuse or escalate the problem. Also, educators should reflect on whether there are any cultural misunderstandings or problems in communication that may contribute to the problem behavior and the student's understanding of the classroom rules.

PART TWO: P.R.O.M.P.T. Steps Prior to Office Support

PROMPT is a method of progressively and systematically responding to problem behaviors that do not immediately require office support. The aim of this method is to respond to and correct the problem behavior using progressively more intensive strategies, while at the same time preserving the relationship with the student. PROMPT is predicated on the research demonstrating that most problem behaviors are normal or typical behaviors that even most adults would exhibit in school (e.g., being periodically off-task, forgetting materials, talking to peers, etc.). The goal is to get good behavior back on track and not to immediately reprimand or punish the student for initially engaging in problematic behavior. Again, the PROMPT method will not be as effective if the foundational supports are not in place. It may seem like a long sequence, but the prompt can take 2 minutes or less. PROMPT represents an acronym that outlines the sequence of procedures to be implemented.

- ❖ **Proximity control** involves physically standing near the student to correct behavior. For many problem behaviors, the first step before a verbal interaction with the student should be to stand next to the student or students who are beginning to engage in off-task, disruptive behavior. In fact, up to 40% of problem behavior can be corrected with proximity control. Proximity control is used both as a response to problems that are already occurring and as a prevention of potential problems. When a teacher is mobile and moves about the classroom, students must be alert in order to track and pay attention to the speaker.
- ❖ The idea behind proximity control is to “teach like the floor is on fire.” This means that the attentive and aware teacher or paraprofessional continually moves around the room and scans for both positive behaviors to acknowledge and for the earliest warning signs of problem behaviors. When the educator observes a problem behavior, he or she can end the problem by simply moving next to the source without disrupting the flow of instruction.
- ❖ **Redirection** involves asking the student to do something different. Specifically, it is a request or instruction that has a low probability that the student would become defiant or noncompliant. The aim is to gain momentum with compliance and rule following and then to get the student back to the task at hand. The goal here is to regain

instructional control over the student. If the student complies with the request, then the student is now under the educator's instructional control and will likely stop the inappropriate behavior if redirected to appropriate behavior. Examples of redirection tasks include asking the student to hand out papers, collect papers, sharpen pencils, run an errand next door, etc.

- ❖ **Ongoing Monitoring to shape behavior** involves keeping an eye on the student to catch the student behaving well after the educator has returned the student to a task. Teachers and paraprofessionals often miss opportunities to reinforce and praise appropriate behavior after issuing a redirection or using proximity control. After using either of these tactics, the teacher should pay close attention to the student, and at the first signs of good behavior, be ready to reinforce (e.g., give points, a thumbs up, smile) and praise the student (e.g., "I really appreciate your getting your book out. Thanks a lot!"). By engaging in ongoing monitoring to shape behavior, the teacher is able to help establish momentum for on-task, complaint behavior instead of for problem behavior. This is also called "catch the student behaving well." When a teacher engages in ongoing monitoring of the student to shape his or her behavior to be better in the class, the student is more likely to alter his or her behavior from inappropriate to appropriate behavior.
- ❖ **Prompt** involves providing a direct, explicit, and concise command to the student about what he or she should be doing instead of the problem behavior. Often teachers and/or parents provide commands that are phrased as a question or involve multiple commands at once. An effective prompt of command is positively stated ("Do this" instead of "don't do that"), is singular (one direction at a time), and is a statement and not a question. Ultimately, an effective command tells the student precisely the behavior the teacher wants him or her to exhibit instead of the problem behavior: this command is given a private, calm, non-threatening, respectful manner. A prompt example might be, "Clay, I need you to begin the test now."
- ❖ **Teaching Interaction** is a standardized method of turning instances of continuing problem behavior into a teachable moment. As a result, a teaching interaction treats the presence of chronic problem behavior as an opportunity for the student to learn appropriate, desired behavior. The aim of the teaching interaction is to keep the student in a calm and receptive state of mind, so that he or she can learn from the interaction. A successful teaching interaction should be delivered in a private, calm, non-threatening, respectful manner.
 - **EMPATHY STATEMENT & LABEL THE INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR:** In a private way, begin the interaction with the student with an empathy statement that conveys that you understand the reason, motive, or emotion underlying the problem behavior. After the empathy statement give a factual description of the inappropriate behavior (e.g., I could imagine that you really needed a pencil and sometimes we want what we don't have. But, what you did is take his pencil without asking.)
 - **LABEL ALTERNATIVE, APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR:** Describe the alternative, acceptable behavior (e.g., What you should have done instead is ask to use the pencil and respect the other person's decision. For example you could ask, "Do you mind if I use your pencil for a moment?")
 - **RATIONALE:** Give a reason why the alternative behavior is better (e.g., When we ask to use something before taking it, people are more likely to get along with us and give us respect in return.)
 - **CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING:** Ask for understanding (Do you understand?). This step is partially to gain compliance but also a quick check to see if the student is ready to cooperate. A simple nod will suffice.
 - **DELIVER WARNING OR DISCIPLINE CONSEQUENCE:** Now the educator is at the point in the interaction where delivering a firm yet respectful warning of the possible looming disciplinary consequence is in order. It is important to do this person-to-person, with no attention solicited from observers. If the student does not comply after the warning, follow through with the in-class disciplinary consequences. If the student continues with the problem behavior, then request office support.
 - **Teaching Interaction Step #1: After presenting the choice to the student with the warning,** it is critical to allow some 'Thinking Time.' Give the student some time to decide whether or change to an

appropriate behavior. This will put the student in a decisional dilemma. The student can make a choice to either get back on task or receive the disciplinary consequence. Thinking Time should be anywhere from 1 to 2 minutes in length. Be sure to give the student some space. Move away and then return and ask the student what he or she decided. (“You have a choice to make. Either you give the pencil back or you’re going to lose the privilege of being able to use free time at the end of the class. I’ll leave you alone for a minute and come back to see what you decided.” After a minute, ask, “So, what’s your choice?”)

- **Teaching Interaction Step #2, if necessary: In-class disciplinary consequence is now delivered if the student is unable to comply.** Apply the consequence calmly, yet firmly. This can include the application of a variety of consequences:
 - Loss of a classroom privilege
 - Request the student make up for the lost instructional time in the form of a Contribution Plan to assist the teacher on various tasks in the classroom
 - Require the completion of a Refocus Form explaining how the problem happened
 - Complete a Refocus Form with a written apology to all those affected by the behavior
 - Remove to time-away in the classroom for a cool down
 - Use your colleague next door, your “Teaching Buddy” Send the student to a buddy’s class to complete the Refocus Form. Instruct the student that if he does not return within the allotted amount of time (e.g., 10-minutes) it will turn into an office support referral. If you select this out of classroom option, be sure to file the Refocus Form with the office. It is important that students not be out of the classroom continuously with this process, class after class. Having an office log is critical whenever a student is in an alternative setting, even for a brief period of time. The receiving teacher has a desk for this purpose, pencils available, a timer and a Refocus Form nearby so that classroom disruption is minimized.
 - School-home communication
- **Teaching Interaction Step #3, if necessary: Request for office support and a solution-focused process.** If the behavior does not respond to the graduated sequence of steps described above, or if the behavior is overtly dangerous and requires an immediate removal, calmly refer the student. (see below)

PART THREE: Transitioning Non-Emotionally

Complete the Office Support Referral form, requesting a solution-focused problem solving session.

Send the student to the office. Stand near the student and calmly state that there must be some problem that needs investigating as you felt certain the student would comply if he or she could comply. Remember, you wish to preserve the relationship, while simultaneously solving the problem that is disrupting the learning of this student and others. Tell the student you look forward to resolving the problem and discovering the outcome of the office support referral.

Send the student to the office with the referral form, or send another student with the form after the student has departed. If you are not sending the form because of an immediate, dangerous situation, call the office to describe what has transpired and tell them that the form will be there very soon.

PART FOUR: Solution-Focused Office Support Process

The office staff will investigate the root causes of the behavior. Pay attention to both the teacher's perspective (Teacher voice) from the referral form and the student's perspective (Student voice) from the interview (see attached) to determine the purposes and causes of the problem behavior.

Teacher voice: Examine the office support referral form to identify the problem behavior in need of support and the category of concern: irritating, mildly disruptive, disruptive, potentially dangerous, dangerous. Examine the form to determine how often the problem occurs and pay attention to other input from the teacher (see attached).

Student voice: What did the student want or need that caused the behavior to occur?

1. Student's purpose in using the behavior is for one of two reasons
 - a. To get something that he or she desires
 - b. To escape or avoid something unpleasant, boring, or non-preferred
2. Contributing events that caused the student to select a problem behavior to handle the situation
 - a. Academic difficulty; behavior was an unskillful attempt to handle the problem
 - b. Interaction between peers was aversive
 - c. Interaction between the student and teacher was perceived as unsupportive by the student
 - d. Student was responding to an act of bullying
 - e. Student was bullying someone
 - f. Emotions from other environments or thoughts were driving the behavior

Apply a solution-focused intervention, which may include a variety of next-steps: *(more than one can be selected)*

1. Restitution or contribution plan – giving back to the setting and environment (taking ownership and making good)
2. Practicing skills to find a better way to meet the need. This can be especially helpful for young students
3. Apologizing to injured parties and a debrief process for finding alternatives next time, "Thinking about my inappropriate behavior"
4. Designing support to help the student communicate needs more effectively
5. Designing support for teachers to develop skills in resolving problems before they occur, when they are occurring, and after they have occurred.
6. Contribution plan: acts that must be performed to make up for time spent in processing (e.g., help secretaries sort papers, help another teacher grade quizzes, assist the custodians, help noon aide patrol areas, etc.)
7. "Fresh start meeting" with teacher and student mediated by an administrator after a pre-meeting with both parties.
8. Parent meeting to establish school-home communication system
9. Begin implementation of a Tier 2 intervention (mentor-based support, self-monitoring, behavior contract, etc.)
10. Further investigation sessions may need to occur to resolve the root causes of the problem.
11. The solution may also be determined to be a punishment. After thoroughly investigating the problem behavior, administrators may opt to try alternatives to suspension (see attached); however, in some circumstances administrators may determine that suspension or expulsion is necessary to maintain an

orderly school environment. If the decision is made for suspension or expulsion, the administrator should explain to the student why this is selected vs. other solutions.

Case Studies: MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

FRANCO is a 9th grade student living in his fifth foster placement. He acts silly, disrupting the classroom to “get a laugh” his teacher reports. The team has placed him in a self monitoring intervention and he is having good and bad days. The referral indicated this was another episode of mildly disruptive behavior: he stood up and started demonstrating dance moves in history class from the culture the class was learning about. The teacher has previously told you that “he gets on my nerves.” There is no evidence of the teacher doing any of the PROMPT steps on the referral form, nor are all baseline requirements in place. Franco tells you the teacher is “boring and mean” and that “she picks on me no matter what, so I just ignore her, but I will try to tone it down a bit a guess.”

- What are solution focused next steps for the administrator? Possibly for the RTI team? Outline all next steps
- What do you propose for next steps with Franco? Outline all steps

MICHELLE is a 7th grade student living with both parents and grandparents, and several family members volunteer regularly at your school. She is in a clique of girls who have been described by others as “mean” this year. Michelle was caught with a cell phone message from a peer making fun of a student with an IEP, saying that she’s “creepy, a retard, and wears dumb clothes”

- What are solution focused next steps for the administrator? Possibly for the RTI team?
- What do you propose for next steps with Michele? Outline all steps

Case Studies: ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

ANGEL is a first grade student living with a single parent who works two jobs. He is often watched after school by a 12 year old sister. Angel has a difficult time completing work rapidly enough to finish with the other students, though his achievement is in the low average range in reading and average in math. The teacher is known as kind, caring, supportive, and has strong baseline skills in relationships as well, in addition to good teaching skills. This referral is Angel’s first referral. The teacher states he tore up the papers, ran around the room throwing others’ papers on the floor, screaming this is “stupid, STUPID and school is boring, boring, BORING!” The teacher states this was disruptive. Angel is remorseful, sobbing, and asking to go home.

- What are solution focused next steps for the administrator? Possibly for the RTI team?
- What do you propose for next steps with Angel? Outline all steps

CAESAR is a fourth grade student on a Check in Check out program for the target behaviors of fighting at recess (respectful problem) and for disrupting others during seatwork (responsible/respectful problem). He lives in a group home at the moment due to a foster home placement shortage, but has been in and out of birth parent homes and foster placements and is strongly influenced by teacher attention. This teacher has some, but not all, of the baseline skills, though she has faithfully done the CICO check out. He has had good days and bad days, but the trend line shows steady movement after three weeks of implementation. The office referral was for dangerous behavior, never observed before. He grabbed some sharp scissors from the teacher’s desk, claiming they cut better than his safety scissors, and would not return them when the teacher asked, getting belligerent, and standing at the back of the classroom. The teacher removed all the students, then was able to get him to hand over the scissors and escort him to the office. Caesar is very quiet in the office, with a barely audible voice, saying, “Please don’t get me in trouble!” He tells you he overheard the group home staff state that due to overcrowding, he was soon to be transferred to a new placement, a specialized foster home.

- What are solution-focused next steps for the administrator? Possibly for the RTI team?
- What do you propose for next steps with Caesar? Outline all steps.

PART FIVE: R³: Reconnect, Repair, and Restore

There are numerous situations in school where staff engage in negative interactions with students, often times for justifiable reasons. These negative interactions typically occur because a student exhibits problem behavior or a teacher or administrator misinterprets a student's behavior (e.g., student exhibiting a cultural relevant behavior). Many negative interactions with students result in the use of disciplinary in an attempt to derive a solution to the problem behavior, particularly when proactive foundational supports are not implemented and reactive methods like PROMPT are not used. Many students perceive these situations as negative, aversive experiences, which can harm and weaken the relationships educators have with students and, ultimately, result in students feeling less connected to a class specifically or the school more broadly. Although many negative interactions with students can be avoided when the procedures discussed above are implemented, some cannot because students' problem behavior will trigger a response from the adults, which may include the use of disciplinary consequences, that are perceived as negative experiences by the student. As a result, schools must adopt a follow-up procedure that reconnects with the student following disciplinary actions in an attempt to repair any harm caused by the situation and restore a positive relationship and connection to the school.

- ❖ **Reconnect** involves scheduling a time to meet with the student following a negative interaction and/or delivery of a disciplinary consequence. It is pivotal to reconnect with the student because all too often students experience negative interactions with the adults but there is no scheduled follow-up time to repair and restore the relationship and connection to the school.
- ❖ **Repair** involves the staff's attempt to fix or remediate any harm or damage done to the relationship between the adults and the student. To repair the relationship, it is important to communicate to the student that the staff are willing to let go of the previous behavior and start fresh (a do-over). To repair harm or damage it is important to validate the student's motive (wanted to talk to a peer about something important), feeling (frustrated with being called a name by another student), or function (avoiding academic work by taking a break) underlying the problem behavior. To do this, one simply needs to acknowledge that one understands that it can be.
- ❖ **Restore** involves welcoming the student back to the class and encouraging the student that he can be successful in class. When one spends the time to successfully reintegrate the student into the class and ensure that continued efforts are made to restore the relationship with the student, it decreases the future likelihood of problem behavior.