

# MOVING FORWARD

News and information about the education of special needs students for teachers and parents

CREATING BEHAVIORAL PLANS  
Fall 2013

## THE BEHAVIOR DETECTIVE

All behavior serves a purpose. Children's actions can be motivated by the need for attention, avoidance, revenge or just the customary desire to engage in a power struggle with an adult. Knowing why something occurs is only part of the mystery. There are so many other factors that make up the puzzle defining human behavior.



To write an effective behavioral plan you have to first compose a **Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)**.

An **FBA** is a process for gathering information for the purpose of understanding the **function** of behavior. In addition to identifying the purpose of behavior, an FBA also examines the circumstances, frequency and the intensity of actions.

Many children have the potential to be little monsters, especially if left to their own devices. Start working at behavioral management early. Little monsters can turn into big monsters when they get older, and it is much more difficult to reign them in once they approach adulthood.

The key to a good FBA involves looking for patterns of behavior over time. This involves observing the behavior in various settings to try to understand the motivation behind it. The goal of a plan isn't to just eliminate the target behavior, but to teach the child to get his/her needs met by utilizing a more constructive outlet.

Just having a concrete set of household or classroom rules is sometimes not enough to ward off inappropriate behavior. Some children will need an actual plan to address their poor conduct. In the world of education, this is known as a **Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP)**. To write a behavior plan may sound like a simple task, but it is really a very time consuming, complex practice.

Creating a good FBA involves good detective work. Testing ideas, using deductive reasoning, interviewing sources, and looking for clues will help you solve the mystery of behavioral cause and effect.

All children need boundaries, rules and structure, but some children require stronger supports. A good BIP is a work-in-progress, and an essential part of holding children accountable for their actions.

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"If a child doesn't know how to read, **we teach.**  
 If a child doesn't know how to swim, **we teach.**  
 If a child doesn't know how to multiply, **we teach.**  
 If a child doesn't know how to drive, **we teach.**  
 If a child doesn't know how to behave,  
**we.....teach? ...punish?**  
**Why can't we finish the last sentence as  
 automatically as we do the others?"**

(Herner, 1998)

**Typical Questions to Address in a FBA**

- How often does the undesirable behavior occur and how long does it last?
- Where does the behavior typically occur or never occur?
- Does the behavior seem to be related to who is or is not present?
- What seems to trigger the behavior?
- What consequences follow, and what is the child's reaction to them?
- Is there a certain classroom, day or time that the behavior occurs?
- What does the child "get" out of this behavior?
- Are there any specific rewards the child will work toward?



**Typical Questions to Address in a BIP**

**Proactive**

- What adjustments will be used to make the student's problem behavior less likely to occur?
- How can the triggers be minimized, or how can we teach the child to recognize the triggers as a first step in learning to control their actions?

**Educating**

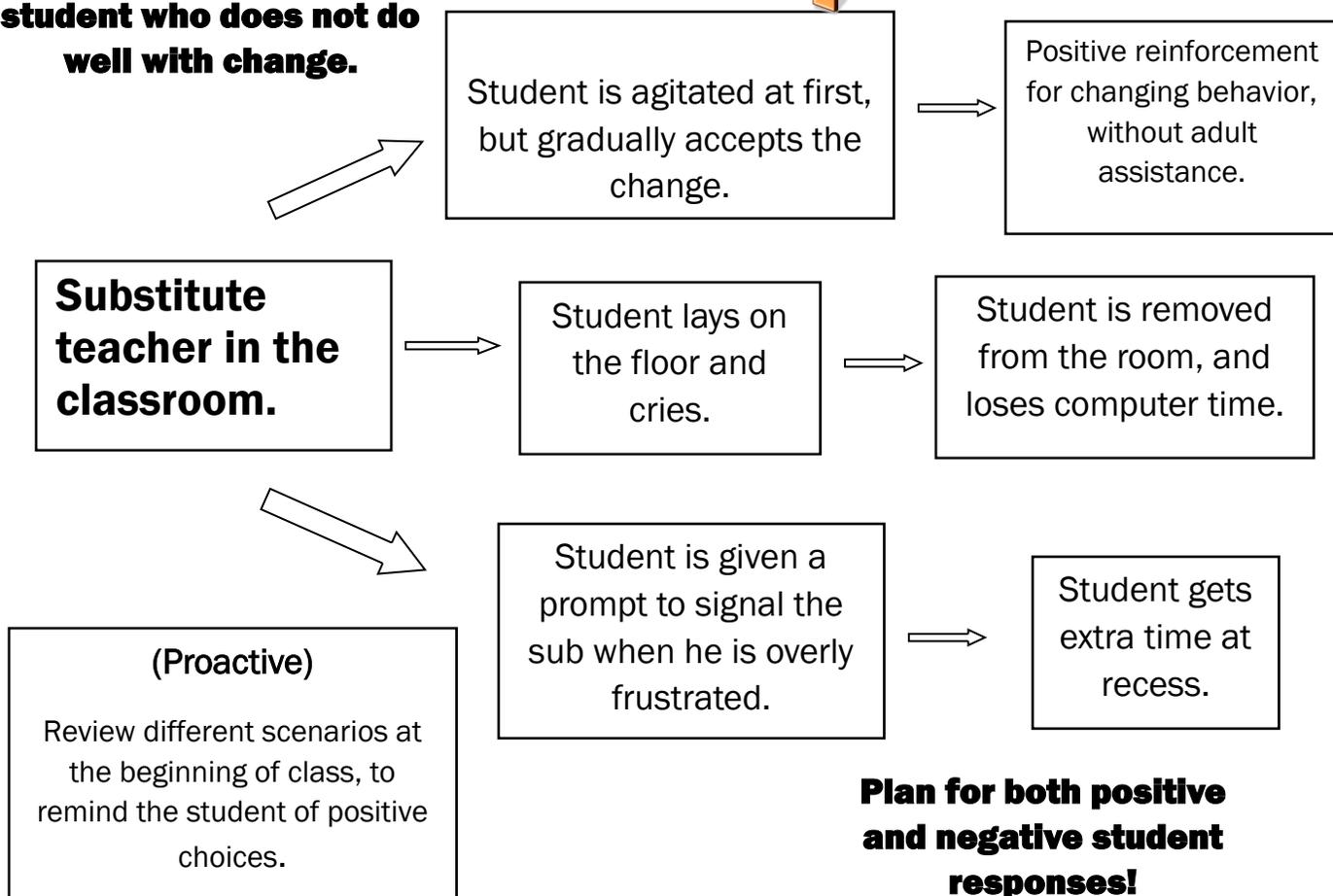
- What behaviors (skills) will be taught to replace or improve his or her ability to function more effectively?
- Are the expectations clear and explicit? How can we avoid enabling the behaviors, and guide the child into becoming more independent?

**Effective**

- How will consequences be managed to insure the student receives reinforcement for positive behavior, not problem behavior?

Source: Laura A. Riffel, Ph.D

**Example of a plan for a student who does not do well with change.**



**Plan for both positive and negative student responses!**

# KEY COMPONENTS OF A SOLID BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION PLAN (BIP)

It's important to remember that the purpose of a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) is not to outline punishments, but rather to define what supports will be put into place to help the student manage his/her behavior.

A good BIP should always include the following elements:

- Input from teachers, parents and support staff.
- Only one or two behaviors are chosen for the plan.
- A summary of the FBA, including a definition of the behavior, and a data-based analysis of the function of the behavior.
- A measurable description of the target behavior.
- The strengths of the student, so the team can incorporate meaningful rewards and build on confidence.
- An outline of what replacement behaviors will be taught, how they will be taught, and who will be responsible for teaching them.
- Immediate incentives for productive changes, or negative consequences for poor choices.
- Timelines for meeting the goals outlined in the plan.
- Ways in which the skills will be taught (e.g., role playing, social stories).
- The type of adult prompts or feedback necessary for the plan to succeed.
- All settings and potential changes, both planned and unplanned, should be addressed.
- A variety of consequences that are equal to the severity of the infraction.
- Both home and school versions, so that everyone is on the same page.
- Regular progress-monitoring of the plan at scheduled intervals.
- What has worked or did not work in the past, in terms of attempts at curbing poor behavior.
- What should happen if the child's behavior becomes serious, or a danger to self and others.



Remember to revisit the plan often to set higher goals, tweak the present ones, or wean off supports to help the student to become more independent.

## Defining Target Behaviors

### Good Example

Hits others

Crying

Lying on the floor and refusing to move



### Poor Example

Aggressive

Frustrated

Stubborn



### Summary Statements

1. **When this occurs...**

(Describe circumstances/triggers)

2. **The student does...**

(Describe target behavior)

3. **To get/to avoid...**

(Describe consequences of target behavior)

# WHEN SHOULD YOU WRITE A BEHAVIOR PLAN?

- When the child exhibits consistent and significant behavior problems that interfere with their learning and/or others in the class.
- When the child demonstrates major emotional difficulties (including frustration, anxiety, depression, fear) that interfere with learning and/or others.
- When the child demonstrates substantial difficulties with organization, motivation, or work completion.
- When the child demonstrates any other significant or consistent issues that affect his/her school experience and learning.



- “No action is a decision.” When a child shuts down, and refuses to work or comply with school rules.
- When the child ceases to make progress that is not the result of inadequate skill level.
- When the child experiences a significant, negative behavioral change for unknown reasons.
- When the child’s poor social skills interferes with forming positive relationships with peers.
- When you are not sure if failure is a choice.

*Our behavior toward each other is the strangest, most unpredictable, and most unaccountable of all the phenomena with which we are obliged to live. In all of nature, there is nothing so threatening to humanity as humanity itself.*

Lewis Thomas

## DOGGED BY BAD BEHAVIOR?

Ever have a puppy? Innately, puppies have to chew on something. Toys, toes, shoes, pillows or just about anything that will fit in their mouths. You can't just say “*don't chew on my things*” and expect change. When you yell, the dog may look solemn for a moment, but turn your back, and he will trounce right back to your closet for another snack.

Unfortunately, by nature, many teenagers test rules and adult authority. It's the adolescent human version of chewing. The poor behavior can be mild or severe and last for a day, a week, or a year. You can't just scream “follow the rules” and expect change. When you yell, your child may look solemn for a moment, but turn your back, and he/she will soon repeat the negative behavior.

One solution that may work in both scenarios is to teach replacement behaviors. Puppies are going to chew, and teenagers are going to rebel. Replace your shoes with tempting bones for the dog. Provide positive outlets for anger and frustration for your growing child. Teach your child to make better choices, instead of trying to fight back against mother nature.



### **Moving Forward**

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**SUCCESS IS RELATIVE!**