What Parents Should Know...
About Behavioral Issues at School

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? ...we punish?

**Why can't we finish the last sentence as automatically
as we do the others?**

Herner, 1998

What Schools Should Be Doing
About Student Behaviors

**By Rebecca Cain, Special Education Programs,
South Dakota Department of Education**

School is not just a building where students earn grades for learning to read and write, but rather, it is the setting in which children gain life skills to become successful adults. Many times students leave school with both academic and behavioral skills that will carry them through life. These skills have been effectively taught, modeled, and reinforced throughout their elementary, middle and high school career and have given the student the skills to interact successfully with others in day-to-day activities. But what happens if the teaching, modeling, and reinforcing of socially acceptable behaviors are not a part of the student's school experience? And what can parents and schools do to ensure students are benefiting from positive behavioral supports to help them become successful?

Writing and implementing a positive behavior support plan as a team is a highly effective way to help shape a student's behavior. This can be done through the same team process used to write IEPs for students, but does not only apply to students on IEPs. Any student who is exhibiting socially problematic behaviors can benefit from a positive behavior support plan.

The following are some tips parents and schools should keep in mind when holding a meeting on behavior:

1. Before the meeting, gather as much information on the behavior as possible. Talk to teachers from previous years, conduct observations, and collect data. This data should give the team a clear picture of what the behavior looks like. Use very specific and descriptive words so everyone is on the same page. Consider the word "disrespectful." This behavior can have many different definitions. If different members of the team define it in different ways it will be difficult to implement strategies dealing with the student's behavior. Instead use words that can paint a picture of the behavior such as "she rolls her eyes and slams her book when I ask her to get started" or "he yells 'this sucks' when he is asked to take a test."

2. Find a way to work together for the common good of the student. Spending 45 minutes complaining about the problem is not the best way to solve it. Spend five to ten minutes talking about what the behavior looks like, not how it makes you feel. Feelings are subjective and do not give a clear picture of the behavior. Spend the rest of the time working on what changes need to be made to the student's environment so they are able to be successful.

3. Include the student in at least part of the meeting. For a plan to work, the student needs to "buy-in," to feel they have input. Explain to the student why this plan is important and you are working on this behavior because everyone cares and wants him/her to be successful.

4. It's easy to get caught up in the problems that the student is exhibiting and forget that the student is simply trying to communicate some type of need. This can be frustrating for all involved, including the child. Sometimes just having a written procedure for all students who become frustrated, allowing them some time to themselves to "process," is very beneficial to both students and staff.

5. When holding a meeting to create a behavior support plan, consider the cause of the problem. Look at the data to see what is reinforcing the student's problem behavior. This will help you figure out what is motivating the student to continue using the behavior to get what they want. Are they trying to obtain something such as peer or teacher attention, or are they trying to avoid something? These are usually the two reasons students use problem behaviors to communicate. Perhaps the student is overwhelmed by the amount of work the teacher is giving them, and instead of communicating this to the teacher with words, they find it easier to rip up their work and throw it away. Children do not always make the best decisions, because, well, they're children, and most are not capable of making the same type of decisions an adult would in most situations.

6. Because it's necessary to teach the behaviors you want to see, the behavior support plan needs to include what behaviors will be taught, how they will be taught, and who will be teaching them. This is a very effective way to give him/her a tool that will not only work in school situations, but will be something they can take with them after graduation.

7. It's important to remember that, depending on the behavior, the student may not be able to do a 180 degree turn and suddenly exhibit the desired behavior. The teacher will need to decide what behaviors he/she will accept from the student during the behavior shaping process. For example: The class is expected to complete a 30 problem assignment in 45 minutes. If this task is overwhelming for the student, how can the student appropriately let the teacher know they are overwhelmed? The student's first reaction may be to throw the paper away and walk out of class. A plan could be put in place that would allow the student to be able to signal

Removing Students From Classroom Considered Suspension

Some students have plans in place where the school will call the parent to come and get the student when they are exhibiting certain behaviors. Both parents and schools should know, when you remove a student from their regular school setting for any length of time for any type of behavior, it needs to be counted as a suspension. For students on IEPs this type of removal counts towards their ten days of suspension to hold the manifestation determination meeting.

the teacher appropriately and the teacher would allow them to complete half the problems now and half at another time. This does two things:

1) it leaves the student in charge of their own behavior and helps them recognize when they are overwhelmed or frustrated, and
2) it keeps the student in the room completing the work, and the teacher is maintaining instructional control of the situation.

This is a teaching process that will take time and effort from parents, teachers, and the student and can be shaped over time.

8. A couple other things to keep in mind when developing behavior support plans are to make sure to take data on the behavior once the plan has been implemented. It may not feel like the behavior is changing, but the numbers may show small improvements that should be celebrated! Also, if possible, take data on the POSITIVE behavior. If you have a student who is always talking without raising their hand, take data on how many times they do raise their hand appropriately. When we get focused on looking for negative behaviors, we tend to miss the positive things the student is doing.

9. Before adjourning the meeting, set a time for the group to get back together to review the progress. This follow up meeting should take place about four to six weeks out. Both parents' and teacher's schedules fill up fast so it is best to set a date and keep it.

10. Remember, it usually takes about four to five weeks for a behavior plan to show great results, and a lot of times they will need to be tweaked a time or two. Don't give up! Kids who have had different behavior plans in the past know what to do to get the teachers to stop implementing them. There is a good chance the behavior will get worse before it gets better as the student attempts to take control of the situation. Be persistent and consistent and if the plan is written correctly, you will see results.

The South Dakota special education website has many resources for both schools and parents to utilize. The Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports section has tools for conducting an effective behavior support plan meeting as well as a template to make sure all the necessary areas are being addressed. This information can be found at **http://doe.sd.gov/oess/sped_pbis.aspx.**

Links to Information on Behavioral Health

Behavior Suite – Resources for Behavior Assessment, Plans, and Positive Supports; Behavior at Home; and Behavior at School — **http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/behavior/**

Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children – **www.challengingbehavior.org**

Dr. Mac's Behavior Management Site – **www.behavioradvisor.com**

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports – **www.pbis.org**

Positive Environments, Network of Trainers – **www.pent.ca.gov**

What Works Clearinghouse – **http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/**

National Institute of Mental Health – **www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml**

NAMI South Dakota – **www.namisouthdakota.org**

SD Kids Mental Health – **http://sdkidsmentalhealth.org/** Includes: A Parent's Guide to Children's Mental Health Services in South Dakota, Directory of SD Mental Health Clinicians, SD Community Mental Health Centers, Helpful Books, other resources.

Sioux Falls Mental Health Resource Guide – **http://helplinecenter.org/2-1-1-community-resources/resources-guides/**

Black Hills Mental Health Resource Guide – **http://helplinecenter.org/2-1-1-community-resources/resources-guides/**

SD Suicide Prevention – **www.sdsuicideprevention.org/**

SDPC frequently posts stories and links at **www.sdparent.org / Our Resources (Virtual Library).**

Making Sense of PBIS, FBAs, and BIPs

What do the acronyms PBIS, PBS, BSP, FBA and BIP have in common?
They all relate to student behavior.

We want children to be respectful and safe so they can learn, grow and become productive citizens. Positive role modeling, consistent recognition and natural and logical consequences assist students in learning appropriate behavior. Schools have expectations for student behavior which are outlined in school policies. Many schools use positive programs, such as *Character Counts* or *Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports* (PBIS). For most students these general guidelines are all that are needed. About 15% of students need more individualized supports from parents and schools to help them develop acceptable behavior.

One way to ensure the needed behavioral supports for these students may be a Positive Behavior Support Plan (PBS or BSP) or a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). Behavior plans can be developed for any student, an IEP is not required.

How does a team write a positive behavior plan for a student? The team conducts a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) that lists:

- Specific and observable actions that create problems,
- Identifies what may trigger the behavior (not always obvious), and
- What the behavior "accomplishes" or communicates.

Through observation, interview, rating scales and/or discussion the team determines the underlying function of the behavior and develops a plan, with student input as appropriate, to replace and reinforce an acceptable behavior.

A BIP may be part of the IEP *(Consideration of Special Factors)* and is meant to help a student succeed academically and socially. While an IEP has a yearly review, behavior support plans typically need to be discussed and tweaked more often. When changes are made it may take several weeks to determine how successful the supports or changes are. An effective BIP will need the support of all those working with the student.

A student with a BIP is subject to school district policies regarding suspension. However, certain protections exist for a student on an IEP. A Manifestation Determination meeting to discuss whether the behavior is linked to the disability is required:

- When suspension is more than 10 school days
- If the plan results in a change of placement, or a change in placement is being considered

The discussion may also include whether the conduct was a direct result of not following the IEP. If the behavior was not a manifestation of the disability, the student is subject to the school district discipline policies, except that a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) must still be provided.

Recognizing and addressing a student's special needs, including behavior challenges, is the foundation for the child's progress in all areas.

SOUTH DAKOTA
ParentConnection
Resources for families of children with disabilities.

Contact us 24/7 at www.sdparent.org or m.sdparent.org
Call Monday-Friday • 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (central time)
1-800-640-4553