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.

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New This Year at Lighting the Way: Hands-on iPad Lab

iPad technology has opened new avenues of communication for individuals with autism spectrum disorders. For the first time, participants at the annual Lighting the Way (LTW) Conference on June 7-8 will be able to test drive iPad technology at the iPad Lab. Lighting the Way is an annual conference focused on autism spectrum disorders and is held on the Augustana College campus in Sioux Falls each June.

The conference is for educators, child care providers, counselors and therapists and community and business leaders and parents! A parent reception will be Thursday, June 7 from 5 to 7 p.m.

Featured speakers at this year’s event will be Dr. Pamela J. Croke, author of Socially Curious and Curiously Social and Dr. Beth Keeton, an expert in developing Curiously Social. Curiously Social is a simple way to build more friendships and have fun! Dare to Dream offers programming to all people of all ages and all abilities, including inclusive childcare programs for children (birth to 12) and teens (13-19).

A unique feature at the Dare to Dream conference is the Art Gallery with work by South Dakota artists. Information on how to become an exhibitor at the Art Gallery, conference details, and registration forms are available at: www.sdparent.org/Dare to Dream. You may also call 1-800-640-4553 to request registration forms.

Sibshop Set for April

Sibshops provide an opportunity for children, ages 6-12, who have a brother or sister with a disability or chronic health concern to come together for socializing and fun activities. The next Sibshop will be April 28 and will feature a swimming party at Children’s Care Hospital and School in Sioux Falls from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Lunch will be provided.

Pre-registration is required. At www.sdparent.org/Family Life/Sibshops or call 1-800-640-4553.

Navigator Program Guiding Parents and Schools

The Navigator Program, a partnership between the SD Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs and SD Parent Connection, provides individualized guidance to parents of children and youth with disabilities or special health care needs and school professionals at no cost. Peer Navigator Consultants are located around the state and have expertise in issues related to special education, disability, special health care needs, communication and conflict resolution.

Navigators remain objective and neutral as they:

• Help families understand and participate in the IEP process
• Help school personnel support family involvement
• Help families locate and utilize resources
• Help parties improve communication
• Help parties partner to improve results/outcomes for students
• Help parties reach or progress towards agreement

While each situation is unique, communication strategies a Navigator might use include (but are not limited to) clarifying views of participants, taking notes, offering suggestions or resources, explaining technical terms, serving as a reality check, focusing on issues that can be resolved rather than past issues that cannot be changed, helping parties develop and evaluate options, helping parties prioritize issues, and diffusing tension and emotions.

Navigators are not parent advocates, decision-makers, IEP team members or service providers, mediators, compliance advisors or monitors, or legal advisors. When agreement cannot be reached or compliance issues arise, the Navigator will refer parties to the appropriate programs and agencies that can help.

Working with a Navigator is an informal, time-limited, problem-solving process and does not limit a parent’s right to use formal processes such as the help of an advocate, filing a complaint, requesting a facilitator or mediator assigned by the state, or filing for a due process hearing. For information or assistance, please call 1-800-640-4553 or e-mail sdpc@sdparent.org.

www.sdparent.org

Parent Education Series: Support for Families and Professionals

South Dakota Parent Connection and the Sanford School of Medicine Center for Disabilities offer FREE Parent Education and Support sessions each month during the school year across the state.

The sessions are available online and held each month via video-conference on the Dakota Digital Network (DDN) at 7 a.m. CT or 6 p.m. MT in these communities:

• Brookings, South Dakota State University, Pugsley Hall (NE corner of 8th and Medary), Room 214, Enter on north side of building. Permit parking open to the public after 5 p.m.
• Pierre, Capitol University Center, 925 East Sioux
• Rapid City, School of Mines, 501 E. Joseph Street, Classroom Building, Room 109 (Park in Surbeck lot)
• Salem, McCook Central School, 200 East Essex Avenue
• Sioux Falls, Center for Disabilities, Wegner Health Science Center, 1400 W. 22nd Street, Room 106

To access the sessions live via the internet, visit www.sdparent.org/Family Life/Parent Education Series. Sessions are recorded and also available for viewing after each session.

Pre-registration is welcomed, but not required to attend any session.

Upcoming sessions of the Parent Education series are:

• April 12 - Discipline and Children with Special Needs
• April 20 - What Schools Should Be Doing About Student Behaviors
• May 10 - What Schools Should Be Doing About Student Behaviors - Calling a parent to pick up a child from school due to behaviors is not an appropriate response. In fact, it rewards students who wish to escape difficult or frustrating activities. What is the school’s responsibility when it comes to your child’s behavior? This session will discuss strategies, such as Love & Logic and natural consequences, that adults can use to support children and youth (from toddlers on up), to develop appropriate behaviors. Presented by Corona O’Kane.

For more information on the Parent Education series call SDPC at 1-800-640-4553 or visit www.sdparent.org/Family Life/Parent Education Series.
What Schools Should Be Doing About Student Behaviors

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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 let them know you are working on this behavior because everyone cares about him/her and wants them 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 signal the teacher that they need some time to themselves to “process” before continuing with the assignment. The teacher will need to decide what behaviors he/she will accept from the student during the behavior shaping process.

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 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/oes/sped_pbis.asp

Plan Now for Summer Activities and Child Care

Whether your child is in preschool or a teenager, families of children with special needs must find supervised activities and additional caregivers for the months that school is not in session. Visit www.sdparent.org, Family Life/Resources/Respite and Childcare for Tips to Help Families with Children with Special Needs Navigate the Summer Session. Other resources you find on the website include:

- It’s Not to Early to Get Ready for Summer!
- How to Find, Train and Keep Great Sitters When You Have a Child with Special Needs.
- Links to Youth Activities and Camps.

More information and activities can be found at these sites:

- Childcare Helpline, 339-4137 or 211 (Sioux Falls area) or www.helplinelinecenter.org
- Childcare Services, Dept of Social Services, 800-227-3020 or http://dss.sd.gov/childcare
- Children’s Hospital and School, 605-872-2400 or www.cchsi.org (Sioux Falls and Rapid City)
- Here4Youth, Sioux Falls, 605-271-6327 or www.here4youth.org
- Special Olympics South Dakota, 800-585-2114 or www.sosd.org
- www.sittercity.com (for fee)
- www.childcare.gov - Information and resources for locating, choosing and paying for childcare

If you do not have computer access, SDPC will send you copies of the articles. Call 1-800-640-4533.
What Is ESY (Extended School Year)?

Extended School Year is special education or related services provided to students with an IEP when school is not in session, such as summer or other breaks. ESY cannot be limited to particular categories of disability, types of service, or age/grade. ESY is designed to:

- maintain a student's skills if they are likely to experience significant regression in the absence of services and an excessive amount of time to re-learn the skills once back in school, or
- capitalize on a student's emerging skills, or
- address critical life skills addressed in a student's IEP.

How does a student qualify for ESY services? The IEP team determines if ESY is needed, there is no one tool to qualify a student. ESY services to prevent regression of academic, communication, physical, self-help, or behavioral skills can be based on measurable data to indicate a pattern of regression, or a more subjective "likelihood" of regression of skills. The IEP team may consider ESY services to support "emerging skills" for a student on the brink of learning, acquiring or at a critical stage of developing a new skill. Finally, the IEP team may determine ESY services are needed to support "critical life skills" included in the student's IEP goals.

Is there a cost to the family? No. ESY is part of an individualized Free Appropriate Public Education. An IEP team may decide that enrolling the student in an activity that has a cost is an appropriate way to provide ESY services; the school should cover those and related costs.

Does the plan for ESY have to include all of the IEP's goals and services? No. The IEP team decides on the priority goal(s) appropriate for the student at that time.

If my child received services last summer, will he or she get the same thing this year? The ESY component of the IEP must be reviewed and approved each year in the annual IEP meeting. If ESY services were included in last year's IEP, the review must specifically address whether ESY services are still needed.

Do ESY services have to be in the Least Restrictive Environment, the same as during the school year? No. The courts and the US Department of Education has recognized that it may be very difficult to create the same inclusive environment when most general education students are not in school.

Does the family have to go along with the ESY program that the school recommends? No. Students are not required to attend ESY; parents may decide not to have their student participate. If a parent does not agree with the level of ESY services discussed during the IEP team meeting and offered to the student, they can request reconsideration. A new IEP team meeting will be convened to consider the request along with reasons for the denial.

Grandparenting Workshop April 16 in Sioux Falls

"Grandparents, like heroes, are as necessary to a child's growth as vitamins." - Joyce Allston

Being a grandparent to a child with special needs may present challenges. Grandparents of children with special needs may be the primary caregiver or supporting their children as parents. Either way, information, resources and support can make the process easier.

The Sioux Falls Chapter of AARP and SDPC are joining to offer a presentation, "Tips and Tools - Grandparenting a Child with Special Needs" on Monday, April 16 at the Callie Branch Library, 4100 Carnegie Circle in Sioux Falls. To accommodate the busy schedules of grandparents, the presentation will be offered 1:00 - 2:30 p.m. and again from 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. The presentation is at no cost. To register e-mail sdpc@sdparent.org or call 1-800-640-4553.

Visit www.sdparent.org / How We Help/Resources

Making Sense of PBIS, FBAs, and BIPs

What do the acronyms PBIS, BPS, 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 student 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,
- Identities which 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. Please contact SDPC if you have further questions at sdpc@sdparent.org or 1-800-640-4553.

March, April, May 2012

Links to Information on Behavioral Health

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
NAMI South Dakota – http://www.nami.org/sites/NAMISouth Dakota
SD Suicide Prevention – www.sd suicideprevention.org/
SDPC frequently posts stories and links at www.sdparent.org / How We Help/Resources.
Tell Us How SD Parent Connection Has Helped YOU – And You Could Get $50!

Everyday, SDPC staff directly help parents navigate systems, access programs, and develop the skills necessary to be effective advocates for their families, including their children with disabilities or special health care needs. And everyday, we indirectly help families in these same ways as we work with professionals to get families the information and resources they need.

If YOU have a story to share about how SDPC helped your family – or a family/individual you served – please take a few moments to send us an e-mail or note with the information. Don’t worry about things like perfect grammar or spelling…what is important is the power of your personal story. Collecting these stories is critical to sustaining SDPC as a viable organization: to share in our publications, with potential donors, and to demonstrate to the agencies that fund us that our work is worthwhile.

Please send us your stories, and photos of your child(ren) and family. SDPC will not use your real name when sharing stories, if you wish.

Photos need to be suitable for re-printing (at least 300 DPI or no smaller than approximately 6 by 8”) and you will be asked to sign a photo/story reprint permission form. For each story and/or family photo received, you will be entered into a drawing for $50. Please send your story and/or photos to ccrase@sdparent.org or Cheryl Crase at SD Parent Connection, 3701 W. 49th Street, Suite 102, Sioux Falls, SD 57106.