

What Every Administrator Needs to Know about . . .

IMPROVING TEACHERS' SKILLS AT BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

"Behavior management can make or break a teacher." - As shared by an elementary school principal to a group of future teachers.

In my work with teachers I have found that many are well aware of the necessity of behavior management skills and therefore actively seek out additional information and guidance on improving their management skills. Even though most of these teachers are "good managers," they continually look for new ideas and strategies to try to strengthen their skills. I have also worked with (what I would consider too many) teachers who incorrectly or incompletely implement management strategies, who have turned to punitive and negative methods in attempts to gain control, who have questioned their ability to manage a classroom, and as one teacher recently stated, "I got my first teaching job, but I'm so scared. I don't even know how to begin."

School administrators can spend considerable time and effort dealing with the ramifications of teachers who lack behavior management skills including low student achievement, disruptive classrooms, disciplinary referrals, disgruntled parents, and unsuccessful teachers. These administrators are left with little, if any, time to devote to building the behavior management skills of their teachers. The purpose of this workshop is to provide administrators

with information and strategies to improve and strengthen the behavior management skills of teachers.

The approach presented here will be that of an instructional approach to behavior management. I have found this to be the most effective approach for teachers who are instructional managers of their classrooms and for administrators who are instructional leaders of their schools. The basic assumptions of this instructional approach include the following.

- The primary method of preventing behavior problems in the classroom is to effectively teach all students to perform the desired behaviors.
- Behavior is learned and therefore new behaviors can be learned.
- Student behavior problems are opportunities to teach students how educators would like them to behave.

Information and strategies presented are focused on two aspects of behavior management—prevention and intervention. Effective instruction of and incentives for desired student behavior are keys to preventing behavior infractions in school settings. Prevention includes teacher planning and preparation, a positive approach to behavior change, effective classroom instruction, and consistent expectations for student behavior. High quality and adequately supported prevention strategies and practices will promote desired behavior from a majority of the student population. The addition of targeted interventions will increase the number of students who demonstrate desired behaviors. Intervention information and strategies include specific teacher behaviors involved in surface management, delivering praise, reprimands, and requests, teaching for generalization, and increasing motivation and incentive. Effective strategies for dealing with noncompliance and behavior problems of individual students are valuable intervention strategies.

Additional goals of this workshop include assisting administrators in redirecting teachers to focus on the positive/desired behavior of students, rather than the problem/undesired behavior of students, to adopt an instructional approach to behavior management, to focus on prevention and intervention, and to consider this question when planning for instruction, “What can I do to make it easier for my student to learn and do what I want them to learn and do?”

Prevention

Prevention begins well before the students arrive when teachers are provided with prevention information and planning time. Preventative practices and strategies are provided to all students before the first signs of problem behavior. Prevention emphasizes providing high quality instructional programs that effectively teach all students the skills they need to succeed in school.

Teacher Attitude and Communication

Prevention begins with teachers who are positive, efficiency focused, capable, and organized. Teacher communication, including verbal and non-verbal language, posturing, tone of voice, that is supportive, clear, calm, and assertive promotes positive student behavior.

Classroom Arrangement

Classrooms should be arranged to maximize visibility and accessibility, and reduce distractibility. Effective arrangement of classroom furniture and equipment, student seating, materials, and instructional centers can increase the ease with which students and the teachers function and learn in the classroom. Attention to high traffic areas and taking steps to reduce congestion can also prevent behavior difficulties and disturbances.

Behavioral Expectations and Incentives

Effective behavior management requires that teachers and students know exactly what behaviors are expected and desired and what behaviors are not accepted. Strategies for the establishment of classroom rules and routines and the explicit instruction of those rules and routines serve this purpose. Rules are most effective when they are few in number, positively stated, and consistently enforced. Routines that are adequately taught enable students to perform the required procedures of the classroom efficiently and without confusion. Students who are taught and who experience the incentives for following rules and routines are more likely to continue to do so.

Teaching Social Behavior

Research indicates that teachers who devote adequate instructional time during the first 3 weeks of school to teach rule, routines, and desired social behavior to students, will experience higher levels of student achievement and lower levels of student misbehavior throughout the entire school year. Prevention includes teaching students the social skills required in school settings. Social skill instruction follows an explicit instruction model that includes modeling, role play, student practice, corrective feedback, and generalization activities.

Teacher Praise and Recognition

Research indicates that teachers are much more likely to notice, attend to, and comment on undesired or negative student behavior than on desired or positive student behavior. On the other hand teachers who effectively praise and recognize students several times each day will serve to promote desired student behavior in their classrooms. Effective praise is specific, genuine, immediate, and complements student achievement.

Relationships

Students respond more positively to teachers they see as caring, understanding, and genuinely interested students. Within a social learning perspective, behavior is determined by an individual's interaction with his/her environment, including the people, places, events, and interactions. Teachers can promote positive behavior by building communities of caring and support within their classrooms.

Effective Instruction

Providing students with effective instruction throughout the school day is an important preventative practice. Effective instruction includes well planned, organized interactive instruction that is relevant to student interests, responsive to student skill level, and provides challenge and high levels of active student involvement. Additional components of effective instruction include: teacher-directed instruction, efficient use of classroom time, quick pacing and transitioning, frequent monitoring of student progress, prompting and scaffolding, and increased opportunities for student correct practice.

Intervention

Even though the majority of students will respond to effective prevention practices and strategies, teachers must be capable of implementing additional interventions to target specific groups, situations, students, and/or undesired behavior. The intervention information and strategies presented in this workshop include: surface management techniques, teaching for the generalization of behaviors, strategies to build motivation to display desired behavior, the use of group and individual contingency programs, effective teacher reprimands and requests, in addition to specific strategies for addressing noncompliance and specific problem behavior.

The first step in addressing undesired behavior is to review and reteach behavioral expectations and incentives. In order to maintain skills and information, students need to frequently review and practice desired behavior, rules, and routines. Teachers can also implement surface management techniques such as increasing proximity to students and connecting instruction to student values. If students are using desired behavior in some situations but not in others, teachers can teach in various settings and situations. Students can often be encouraged to demonstrate desired behaviors through the use of motivational programs such as public posting or *catch 'em being good* and group contingencies, such as *marble mania* or the *good behavior game*.

Teachers faced with more persistent and challenging undesired student behavior will benefit from a framework for understanding and addressing specific problem behavior and suggestions for implementing individual contingency plans. Strategies for reducing student noncompliance and opposition and avoiding power struggles will also be presented.

Increasing Teacher Effectiveness

Throughout this workshop, the *Prevention and Intervention Rubric* will be addressed. This evaluation tool incorporates the content of this workshop. The rubric can be used by administrators to evaluate the behavior management skills of teachers. Areas of improvement can be identified in addition to prevention or intervention strategies to incorporate in the classroom. Teachers and mentors can use this rubric as an evaluation or self-evaluation tool and a guide for goal setting. Additional suggestions for assisting teachers in improving their behavior management skills will be presented and discussed, include self-monitoring, goal setting, data-driven instruction, mentoring, and resources.

Resources

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