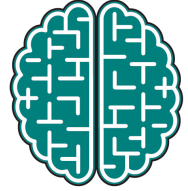


positive behavior principles

Given the rise in discipline problems in schools, coupled with increased standards and rigor, teachers are in need of strategies for supporting behavior change. Compliance-based strategies that were once effective (notifying a parent / sending a student to the office) are not positively shaping and changing behaviors as they once did. (Blustein, 2000) It is for this reason the following principles are outlined.



Prevention

1. Behaviors mainly occur in a relationship.

Rarely, if ever, do behaviors occur in isolation. Behaviors are impacted by the response and reaction of other individuals. A student can be placed in six different classrooms, and based on the interactions of the teacher and other students, exhibit very different behaviors in each setting. The interplay of these interactions must be analyzed as a first step in creating positive behavior change. When faced with a student demonstrating behavioral challenges, a teacher must ask, "What am I doing to build a respectful relationship with this child?" This is not the sole determining factor in the behavioral outcome; however, as the connection between the student and classroom strengthens, he or she will be more likely to exert greater effort in attempting to make positive behavioral choices. (Jensen & Gale Group, 2009; Powell & Marshall, 2011)

Bottom Line: *One of the most effective ways to create positive behavioral change is to strengthen the relationship. This is the case with the students, as well as their parents.*

2. Good teaching incorporates a balance of ritual and novelty.

Rituals provide structure, consistency and feelings of safety. In the classroom it is important for students to be able to anticipate the expectations of the teacher (Scully & Howell, 2008). This is best accomplished with a predictable routine and consistently followed procedures and rules. Although rituals are critical in the classroom, they must be balanced with novelty. Novelty stimulates the brain and focuses attention. (Sousa, 2006; Sousa, 2010)

When teachers have strong rituals with too little novelty, students may become disengaged at which time behavior problems can arise. In this situation, there is an absence of novelty, so students meet this need by talking or moving, both of which options can be disruptive to the learning process. However, when teachers infuse a great deal of novelty without strong rituals in place, behavior often escalates. Effective teaching requires a balance of the two: rituals for creating order and consistency and novelty for interest and engagement.

Bottom Line: *By creating a healthy balance of these two teaching elements, attention to task increases and behavioral concerns decrease.*

3. It is easier to channel behavior than to stop it.

Individuals will get their needs met, one-way or another. Too often, adults try to stop students from exhibiting two basic needs: talking and moving. Although these behaviors can be disruptive,

it is important to understand these behaviors serve important functions. When students talk or move during instruction, they are providing feedback about their needs to the teacher. Rather than trying to stop these behaviors, a more effective approach would be to channel them. Teachers who use chants, songs, activities and other physical means to teach are able to keep students engaged for longer periods of time. This is especially the case with young children who do not have the capacity to stay still or remain quiet for long periods of time. Our goal is to help students develop these competencies as they progress throughout the school year; however, it is much easier to strategically weave socialization and movement into our curriculum at all levels than to attempt to stop these behaviors.

Bottom Line: *The more purposefully we embed opportunities for discussion and movement into our instruction, the less likely students will be to meet these needs on their own.*

4. **Modeled behaviors are internalized.**

The behaviors to which students are exposed serve to shape their own behaviors. Family members, peers, teachers and social media all play a part in this process. (Barber, Olsen, & Shagle, 1994) The more a pattern of behavior is modeled, the more likely it will be viewed as normal or accepted in the mind of the student. It is for this reason adults in the school setting need to continuously model appropriate behaviors. Our word choice, tone, body language and affect are all factors impacting student behaviors. A teacher who has a naturally loud volume level can elicit the same from students if he or she is not aware of this attribute.

This principle is most critical in times of stress. When calm, adults often model positive behaviors. However, when in stressful situations, adults are most at risk for modeling the very behaviors we wish to diminish in our students. It is only in continuously examining our own behaviors in light of this principle that we are able to best shape the behavior of our students.

Bottom Line: *At all times, model the expected behavior.*

INTERVENTION

5. **Attention magnifies behavior.**

Traditional discipline methods often rely on bringing attention to misbehavior as a means of discouraging it. If a student is disruptive in a class, the teacher might publically redirect the student or walk next to him or her using proximity to stop the behavior. Both of the strategies can draw negative attention to the student. When a teacher has a good relationship with a student, these strategies can be effective when used sparingly. However, for students who exhibit more challenging behaviors, these strategies can often serve to escalate behaviors, as well as damage the relationship between the student and teacher. (Sailor, 2008) Rather than verbally pointing out misbehavior, a more effective option is to draw attention away from the problem. Misbehavior can often garner the attention of surrounding students. By focusing the attention of the other students away from the misbehavior, the inappropriate behavior is not inadvertently strengthened. As less attention is given to the inappropriate behavior, the more likely it may be to subside.

When we focus on behaviors, they should be the desired ones rather than the ones we are attempting to extinguish. However, when possible, both positive and negative feedback should be given in a private, rather than public forum.

Bottom Line: *Draw attention away from misbehavior in an attempt to strengthen positive behaviors.*

6. **Developmental levels influence behavior.**

Although we often attribute negative behaviors to poor choices on the part of the student, often times, behavior problems occur because of developmental lags in one or more areas:

- **Social** – Our ability to get along and interact with others
- **Emotional** – Our ability to inhibit or exhibit our emotions appropriately
- **Ethical** – Our ability to understand right from wrong and make good choices
- **Cognitive** – Our intellectual capacity
- **Physical** – Our physical growth and development, coupled with our age

Our abilities in each of these areas of development directly influence our actions, so this information must be taken into account when attempting to understand behavior and design appropriate intervention.

As students get older, teachers naturally have higher behavioral expectations for them. We expect students to “act their age.” However, our chronological age is not always the same as our social or emotional age. Many high school teachers, for example, can identify students who display “middle school” social behaviors. When supporting behavior, social and emotional developmental ages must be taken into consideration.

Bottom Line: *By identifying how developmental levels impact behavior, we are in a better position to target interventions based on specific skills.*

7. **Positive behaviors are strengthened through skill development.**

When a student struggles in understanding an academic problem, we teach. If he or she doesn’t master the skill, we re-teach. This process continues indefinitely until the skill is mastered and the student is successful. This should be the case with regard to behavior as well. When a student misbehaves in the class, the first question we need to ask is “What specific skill does this student need to master?” If a student is shouting out in class, he or she needs to internalize the skill of getting attention appropriately. If the student argues when corrected, he or she needs to be taught how to accept criticism. This principle requires many educators to shift their perspective about the best way to create long-term behavior change. Ultimately, behavior is better shaped through education rather than punishment. (Dowd, Herron, Hyland & Sterba, 1998; Sailor, 2008)

Bottom Line: *When behavior problems arise, educators have an opportunity to shape the behavior through teachable moments. As the skill is developed, the positive behaviors will strengthen.*

CRISIS

8. **When stressed the thinking brain shuts down.**

Reactions or responses can escalate or de-escalate, accordingly. When calm, individuals can be rational, understand cause and effect, make good decisions and think clearly. When stressed, impulsive, emotional and reactionary behaviors surface. (Sousa, 2010) It is important to understand this concept because it is the foundation for having healthy interactions with both

students and adults. *WHEN you intervene is as important as HOW you intervene.* When students are angry or in “crisis” mode, they are not receptive to feedback. Unfortunately, adults often try to reason with an individual in crisis. If our goal is to change behavior, we must focus on timing as a critical factor. *When stressed, **OUTPUT** is turned on and **INPUT** is turned off.* We examine this principle for two main reasons:

- When we see students in “fight or flight” mode, characterized by anxiety and/or heightened stress, our main goal should be to help them get out of “crisis” and move into a better emotional state. When calm, students are in a more receptive state and better able to learn from teachable moments.
- When stressed or upset, adults are less likely to engage in healthy interactions with students. By not “engaging” students while in crisis, adults are better able to diffuse potential power struggles, and ultimately, better model calm behaviors at a more emotionally neutral time.

Bottom Line: *1) When a student is in crisis, the first job is to deescalate. Once calm and rational, new behaviors can be taught and appropriate consequences can be issued. 2) Teachers should be calm and rational when interacting with students. At times, teachers need to “step away” and regain emotional control before discussing behavioral issues with students.*

9. Behaviors are often the result of ingrained **patterns**.

When behaviors are repeated, they develop into patterns in the brain or habits. (Gilkey & Kilts, 2007; Jensen, 2005) When students demonstrate inappropriate behaviors, a teacher’s response or reaction can serve to strengthen a pattern or disrupt it. The most effective teachers are able to minimize attention to these behaviors while using other techniques (distraction, novelty) to better extinguish them. Students who demonstrate repeated behavior concerns tend to develop deeply ingrained patterns; so changing these behaviors can be very challenging. The ultimate goal of intervention in these situations is to lessen the amount of time the student exhibits these behaviors over the course of time. Long-term, lasting behavior change is a process. If a student has had ten years of behavior patterning; reshaping these patterns can take an extensive amount of time. The good news is that students can effectively create different patterns based on environmental cues. A student could function on very unhealthy patterns at home, while still having healthy interactions at school. The pattern is shaped by our response or reaction accordingly.

Bottom Line: *When student exhibit inappropriate behavior patterns, adults should work to disrupt these patterns quickly in an attempt to build positive relationships and healthy interactions. Distraction is one of the most effective ways to disrupt inappropriate behavior patterns in our students.*

These principles are designed to complement behavior management expectations that are clearly outlined and consistently reinforced. When used as a common framework for both prevention and intervention, teachers will be better equipped at creating positive and enduring behavior change in their students.

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