



An increasing number of students with behavioral health disorders are in the classroom. As a result, teachers need to implement strategies to effectively manage their classrooms. Though the majority of children respond positively to approaches that emphasize positive, clearly-defined, school-wide expectations, a significant subgroup of students need more targeted interventions to prevent problem behavior patterns and to succeed in school. These children and adolescents typically need a modified classroom environment along with practice learning behavioral expectations that may differ from those they have learned outside the classroom.

What can educators do about it?

There are specific things you can do in the classroom to prevent and manage problem behavior:

- Post four to five classroom rules that are simple, positively-framed (tell your kids what to do instead of what not to do), and easily seen. Include consequences for following or not following the rules.
- Be consistent in observing and following the rules.
- Make sure that your students understand what behavior is and is not acceptable.
- Try to move around the classroom often (teacher proximity helps), and try different seating arrangements to maximize positive interactions between groups of students.
- Use consistent routines for all classroom activities, from how to ask a question to what to do when requesting to use the restroom.

Carefully observe and measure what is really going on.

- Rather than defining what a student is doing wrong (hitting, getting out of their seat, yelling), ask yourself what the function of the behavior may be (i.e. are they trying to get something, like attention, or avoid something, like school work that is too difficult, by acting out?).
- Notice what is happening in your classroom both before and after a student misbehaves.
- Use one of the many tools available to keep track of antecedents and consequences, which chart a student's behavior based on what is happening in the immediate environment. If, for example, they mostly act

out in math, then perhaps the material is too challenging, or the time of day is difficult (could they be hungry?), or they have trouble with a specific student or teacher. What happens after they act out? Are they rewarded for their negative behavior by receiving attention from you or their peers? Have they been able to avoid doing the work?

Develop a plan to address the underlying motivation.

- Use your observations to develop a theory about why a student is misbehaving and address the underlying motivation. If they are acting out to get attention from peers, for example, then help them learn other ways of getting attention from peers, such as joining an activity or sharing something.
- Teach the student an alternate behavior and reinforce that behavior in a way that will give the student the same response (attention, feeling of competence, etc.).
- Help the student use the more appropriate behaviors by providing frequent feedback (verbal and non-verbal cues).
- Focus on the student's motivation and relate the material to their life.
- If the function of the behavior is to avoid doing work, try a different teaching technique, review directions, consider peer tutoring, or help the student with specific aspects of the work.
- Praise students frequently for replacement (good) behaviors.

Stigma and discrimination are associated with mental health challenges and disorders. Stigma involves negative attitudes (prejudice) and discrimination refers to negative

attitudes and behaviors may hinder youth and young adults with problems from seeking help. They may be ashamed to discuss mental health problems with family, friends, or school staff. They may also be reluctant to seek professional help out of concern about what others will

think of them. People with mental health challenges can begin to believe the negative things that others say about them. Better understanding of the experiences of young people with mental health challenges and disorders can reduce prejudice and discrimination.

Resource Links

Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice

<https://www.air.org/project/center-effective-collaboration-and-practice-cecp>

National Association of School Psychologists

<https://apps.nasponline.org/search-results.aspx?q=observing+classroom+behavior>

Intervention Central

Offers free tools and resources to help school staff and parents to promote positive classroom behaviors and foster effective learning for all children and youth.
www.interventioncentral.org

Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health

Classroom activities
<https://macmh.org/classroom-activities/>

Mental Health America

The country's leading nonprofit dedicated to helping ALL people live mentally healthier lives.
<https://screening.mhanational.org/>

Be Proactive in Managing Classroom Behavior

Babkie, A. M. (2006). 41(3), 184-187.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/10534512060410031001>

Classroom Behavior Management: A Dozen Common

Mistakes and What to Do Instead; Barbetta, P. M., Norona, K. L., and Bicard, D. F. (2005). 49(3), 11-19.
<http://web.cortland.edu/andersmd/psy501/12.htm>

Classroom Factors Linked with Academic Gains Among Students with Emotional and Behavioral Problems

Gunter, P. L., Coutinho, M. J., and Cade, T. (2002). Preventing School Failure, 46(3), 126-132.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10459880209603357>

Evaluation of a Targeted Intervention Within a Schoolwide System of Behavior Support - Journal of Behavioral Education;

Hawken, L. S., and Horner, R. H. (2003). 12(3), 225-240.
<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2003-07831-005>

Where to seek help for a mental disorder? National survey of the beliefs of Australian youth and their parents.

Jorm, A.F., Wright, A., & Morgan, A.J. (2007) Medical Journal of Australia, 187: 556-60
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18021042>

Adapted from Resources found on:
www.schoolmentalhealth.org
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The Children's Mental Health Matters! Campaign is a collaboration of the Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) and the Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) with support from the Maryland Department of Health - Behavioral Health Administration. The Campaign goal, with School and Community Champions across the state, is to raise public awareness of the importance of children's mental health. For more information, please visit www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org