What to Do for Children with Persistent Challenging Behaviors

Nurturing Developing Minds Conference
Greenville, South Carolina
February 28, 2014

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What to do for children with persistent challenging behaviors

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• Clinical Professor, GSU School of Public Health
• Trained as a clinical psychologist
  • Early work in special education settings with children with challenging behavior and autism or related disabilities
  • Began to work more broadly in general education and preschool settings with positive behavior support
  • Became more interested in policy, implementation, workforce, and disparities (not necessarily in that order!)
What to do for children with persistent challenging behaviors

The plan for today

• It’s the end of the day, smile and reflect
• Talk about children with “behaviors” as kids--not diagnoses
• Talk about commonly encountered behaviors and good parenting/teaching practices
• Talk about “functions” of behavior and how “what to do” depends on “why it persists”
• Review *Understand! Prevent! Replace!* as a strategy
• Discuss some current efforts to “scale up”
So, are there “bad” kids?

- We know that there are no “bad” kids, just “bad” behaviors!
- May sound too PC, but as we approach this as an issue, it’s the way to go
- Think of it as vulnerability + social triggers = behavior
- Vulnerable kids (examples)
  - Socially – family circumstances, poverty, housing
  - Psychologically – intellectual disabilities, autism
  - Biologically – temperament, epilepsy, ADHD
- Social triggers (examples)
  - Frustration and failure
  - Being bullied or teased
  - Lack of structure
  - Loneliness
How common are behavior problems?

• *Most* children exhibit some difficult behaviors (e.g., hitting, crying, tantrums) at some point during early childhood.

• Some young children have significant behavioral challenges that require intervention - estimates range between 7% and 25%.

• We expect this to be even higher for children disabilities as they have *at least one* of the “vulnerability” factors noted earlier, which may make them more susceptible to the “trigger” event.
Let’s step back and consider behavior problems!

• Not really discussed in the pediatric literature!
• Diagnoses are discussed
• But, with few exceptions, diagnosis is not highly correlated with the behavior topography (i.e., what we see)
• Knowing diagnosis doesn’t predict behavior of concern
• Most behaviors are problems when they persist—lots of opinions and strategies on how to handle one-time events
• The laws of behavior say that persistent behaviors are being reinforced
• We must understand function!
20 Common Behaviors That Teachers Complain About

- Frequent bathroom use
- Seeking attention
- Tattling
- Talking out
- Crying
- Invading personal space
- Out of seat
- Fidgeting
- Clingy
- Teasing
- Difficulty transitioning
- Inattentive
- Impulsive
- Distractible
- Separation anxiety
- Whining
- Sexualized behavior
- Isolated
- Disrespectful language
- Withdrawn
20 Common Parental Complaints about Behavior

- Sleep problems
- Bed wetting
- Clingy
- Interrupts
- Tattling
- Crying
- Fidgeting
- Teasing
- Doesn’t listen / obey
- Impulsive
- Noncompliant
- School avoidance
- Anxious
- Isolated
- Disrespectful language
- Withdrawn or depressed
- Lying
- Testing limits
- Non-stop gaming
- Non-stop texting
Behaviors That Almost Always Warrant Intervention

- Bullying
- Physical teasing
- Aggression
- Property destruction
- Rude or vulgar language
- Self-injury
- Disruptive
- Defiant or oppositional
Situations That Will Get a Child in **Real Trouble in School**

Anything to do with

- Weapons
- Bombs
- Drugs
What are important first steps in dealing with behavior?

- Provide an organized and predictable environment
- Establish clear daily routines – consistent and fun
- Define 3 to 5 behavioral expectations for all kids
  - Stated positively
  - Defined by activity or setting
  - Understood by the children (may need to be visual)
- Provide lots of genuine, positive statements (4:1)
- Model cooperation and respect
- Make sure kids feel valued and safe
- Teach them what they need to know
Establishing Routines at Home

• Think about establishing routines for:
  – Wake-up
  – Breakfast
  – Going to school/bus
  – Coming home
  – Chores
  – Homework
  – Dinner
  – After dinner
  – Bed time

• Work on one routine at a time
• Ensure success
# Teaching Matrix - Preschool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily Routines</th>
<th>Take Care of Ourselves</th>
<th>Take Care of Each Other</th>
<th>Take Care of Our Things</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrival</td>
<td>• Walk to our cubbies</td>
<td>• Say hello to others</td>
<td>• Put things away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Join play nicely</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Play &amp; Outside</td>
<td>• Follow directions</td>
<td>• Join play nicely</td>
<td>• Treat things safely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ask for help (if we need it)</td>
<td>• Include others</td>
<td>• Put things away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Join play nicely</td>
<td>• Take turns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Include others</td>
<td>• Use our words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Take turns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle</td>
<td>• Sit on mat</td>
<td>• Keep hands and feet in spot</td>
<td>• Clear away mats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Participate</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Hang up jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snack</td>
<td>• Follow directions</td>
<td>• Use our manners</td>
<td>• Put things away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Face the table</td>
<td>• Answer others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Keep hands and feet in spot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Yet, some behaviors persist!

- Problem or challenging behaviors are largely inconvenient to both doer and the receiver.
- If the person had a better way of making his or her needs known, it would be used.
- Persistent behaviors are often forms of communication, that persist because they “work” in getting the person something he or she had wanted.
So, what’s next?

• If saying “no” (or “stop” or using punishment or other reactive procedures) was going to work, it would have worked already!
• The **best** solution to a problem behavior is teaching a replacement skill that can be used at the times and places where the problem now occurs.
• Children with persistent behaviors usually need more teaching, not more discipline.
But first!

- If the child is eligible for special education, then
  - Consider a functional behavior assessment (FBA) if behaviors “impede learning” – their own or others
  - The FBA can guide the development of a behavioral intervention plan (BIP)
- FBAs and BIPs are needed by some children to participate in their “free and appropriate public education”
- This is a civil right!
Individualized Positive Behavior Supports

Understand – by observation and assessment; we call this a Functional Behavior Assessment
Prevent – by identifying ways to minimize behavior as the first component of a Behavior Intervention Plan or BIP
Replace – by teaching new skills or alternative behaviors as the second component of the BIP
**Understand!**

Function
Behavior as communication...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I don’t want to do this! (Escape)</th>
<th>I want attention! (Attention)</th>
<th>I want this! (Tangible)</th>
<th>I like doing this! (Sensory)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Difficult tasks</td>
<td>• From parents</td>
<td>• A toy</td>
<td>• It feels good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prolonged work</td>
<td>• From teachers</td>
<td>• An object</td>
<td>• It looks good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social demands</td>
<td>• From peers</td>
<td>• A food or treat</td>
<td>• It sounds good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be in this place!</td>
<td>• From siblings</td>
<td>• An activity</td>
<td>• It tastes good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be with this person!</td>
<td>• From anyone</td>
<td>• A privilege</td>
<td>• It’s a habit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (please describe):
Prevent!

• Establish an immediate reduction in the frequency or intensity of problem behavior

• Why?
  • Break the cycle of responses that have served to reinforce behavior
  • If behavior doesn’t occur, it can’t be rewarded
  • Minimize the need to “work through” problem behaviors, which is often extremely difficult
  • Establish a more positive climate
  • Meet legitimate needs without problem behavior having to occur first
  • Protect and support others
Prevention is NOT “giving in”

- Changes in setting or interactions that make the behavior less likely to occur – with the caution that this may not be appropriate for the long term!
- Creates the chance to teach

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduce or remove demand</td>
<td>Give extra attention</td>
<td>Give choice of activities</td>
<td>Intervene early in cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divide task into small parts</td>
<td>Pair with a friend</td>
<td>Do preferred activity first</td>
<td>Hold on to a “comfort” toy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give break or quiet time</td>
<td>Play a game</td>
<td>Provide tangible rewards</td>
<td>Take frequent walks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorten length of tasks</td>
<td>Include in group activity</td>
<td>Have child go first</td>
<td>Do a calming activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remove from non-preferred places</td>
<td>Have child sit or play close to parent</td>
<td>Follow schedule for jobs and chores</td>
<td>Provide time to engage in sensory behaviors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (please describe):
Replace!

• New skills or alternative behaviors should:
  – Be acceptable to the individual
  – Be socially acceptable to others
  – Be efficient in that it works as well or better than problem behavior in obtaining the outcome
  – Recruit reinforcement naturally
  – Allow child to avoid negative consequences
  – Be something that the individual is capable of learning and doing
• When in doubt, look at what socially successful peers do
  – Note: it is often *not* what we teach!
Replacement equips people...

• ...to say what they want to say
• Behavior problems are “solved” when an individual has a new skill that occurs spontaneously in the circumstances that now trigger the behavior

I don’t want to do this! (Escape) | I want attention! (Attention) | I want this! (Tangible) | I like doing this! (Sensory)
---|---|---|---
Ask for a break | Request attention | Request preferred items | Ask for a “busy” toy
Ask for help on hard tasks | Take turns | Request activity | Keep busy while waiting
Indicate “all done” | Share | Negotiate | Make coping statements
Understand schedule | Keep a distance from others | Accept alternative item | Learn to quiet or calm self
Other (please describe):
Replacement requires instruction and support

- If skills were going to appear on their own, it would have happened already!
- So...an instructional plan is needed that outlines
  - What to teach
  - Who should teach
  - When and where skills should be taught
  - How should skill be taught (examples)
    - Direct instruction
    - Social stories
  - How skills will be generalized
  - How should we respond to behavioral challenges
What is the BBQuIP?

- Brief Behavior Questionnaire and Intervention Plan
- Originally developed as a quick solution for low resource settings (e.g., home, child care)
- Provides short-answer format to guide user:
  - To identify contextual variables
  - To consider communicative function of behavior
  - To develop hypothesis
  - To link prevention and replacement to function
  - To identify elements for ongoing support
- Versions now in use for at home, school, and preschool/child care settings
Next Steps with the BBQuIP

- Versions now in use for at home, school, and preschool/child care settings
- Examining reliability, validity, and utility
- Testing the use of a computer-based version that auto-populates hypothesis and BIP
- Testing the use of a web-based version
- Integrating BBQuIP with web-based training modules for parents
- Long-term – looking at “app” potential
Online Training Modules

- Introducing the Project
- General Behavior Strategies
- Functional Behavior Assessment
- Completing the Functional Behavioral Assessment
- Developing the Behavior Intervention Plan
- Examples of Behaviors that Serve Different Functions
- Legal Rights of Children
- Working with the School
Behavior Intervention Plan

19) When __________________ and __________________, my problems are
   (Prevention Strategy # 1) much less likely to occur or to escalate.
   (Prevention Strategy # 2)

21) What I really need to learn is ________________________________ .
   (Replacement Behaviors/Alternative Skills)

22) A good way to teach me this would be ________________________________ .
   (Teaching Strategy)

23) A good time to teach me this would be ________________________________ .
   (When will this occur? / How can a teachable moment be set up?)

24) ____________________________________________ would be good people to teach me.
   (Names and Relationships)

25) ____________________________________________ would help me to do this at other times and places.
   (Generalization Strategies)

26) If I do have a behavior problem, the best thing to do is ________________________________ .
   (Management Strategy)
Thank you

- To my colleagues – Stacey Ramirez, Emily Graybill, Jason Cavin, Mark Durand
- To my funders – Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities
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Resources

www.firstsigns.org - First Signs
www.ncld.org - National Center for Learning Disabilities
www.pbis.org - Training and Technical Assistance Center on PBIS
www.research.net/s/BBQuIP - online BBQuIP
www.positivebehaviorvideos.org - online modules
www.cld-gsu.org - Center for Leadership in Disability