

Big Ideas in Classroom Behavior Management

1. **Teach expected behaviors.** Students need to be explicitly taught expected behaviors. They should then be acknowledged and reinforced when they show positive behaviors.

In other words, schools should treat behavior as part of the curriculum: teach it and reinforce it!

2. **Check for academic problems.** The connection between classroom misbehavior and poor academic skills is high.

Educators should routinely assess a student's academic skills as a first step when attempting to explain why a particular behavior is occurring.

If academics contribute to problem behaviors, the student needs an academic support plan as part of his or her behavior plan.

3. **Identify the underlying function of the behavior.** Problem behaviors occur for a reason. Such behaviors serve a **function** for the student. (See the list of possible functions on the next page.)

When an educator can identify the probable function sustaining a student's challenging behaviors, the educator can select successful intervention strategies that match the function—and meet the student's needs.

4. **Eliminate behavioral triggers.** Problem behaviors are often set off by events or conditions within the classroom.

Sitting next to a distracting classmate or being handed an academic task that is too difficult to complete are two examples of events that might trigger student misbehavior.

When the educator is able to identify and eliminate triggers of negative conduct, such actions tend to work quickly and--by preventing class disruptions--result in more time available for instruction.

5. **Focus on factors within the school's control.** Educators recognize that students often face significant factors outside of the school setting--e.g., limited parental support -- that can place them at heightened risk for academic failure and problem behaviors.

Schools can best counteract the influence of negative outside factors and promote student resilience by focusing on what can be provided *within* the educational setting such as skills instruction, tutoring, mentoring, and use of positive behavior management strategies.

6. **Be flexible in responding to misbehavior.** Educators have greater success in managing the full spectrum of student misbehaviors when they respond flexibly--evaluating each individual case and applying strategies that logically address the likely cause(s) of that student's problem conduct.



Problem Behaviors: Common 'Functions'	
Hypothesis	Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SKILL DEFICIT. The student lacks the skills necessary to display the desired behavior (Gable et al., 2009). 	If the student has never explicitly been taught the desired behaviors, there is a strong likelihood that behavior-skill deficit is a contributing factor.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PERFORMANCE DEFICIT. The student possesses the skills necessary to display the desired behavior but lacks sufficient incentive/motivation to do so (Gable et al., 2009). 	Poor motivation is a real and frequent cause of behavior problems. However, schools should first carefully rule out other explanations (e.g., skill deficit; escape/avoidance) before selecting this explanation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACCESS TO TANGIBLES/ EDIBLES/ACTIVITIES. The student seeks access to preferred objects ('tangibles'), food, or activities (Kazdin, 2001). 	The student may use behavior as a means to gain access to reinforcing experiences, such as food treats, desirable objects to play with, or high-preference activities (e.g., computer games, texting).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEER ATTENTION. The student is seeking the attention of other students (Packenham, Shute & Reid, 2004). 	The student may be motivated by general attention from the entire classroom or may only seek the attention of select peers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADULT ATTENTION. The student is seeking the attention of adults (Packenham, Shute & Reid, 2004). 	The student may be motivated by general attention from all adults or may only seek the attention of select educators.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESCAPE/AVOIDANCE. The student is seeking to escape or avoid a task or situation (Witt, Daly & Noell, 2000). 	If the student demonstrates academic ability (e.g., via grades or observed work) close to or at grade level, behavior problems may be tied to motivation issues or attention-seeking. Students with delayed academic abilities are more likely to be driven by escape/avoidance.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EMOTIONAL OR ATTENTIONAL BLOCKERS. The student possesses the skills to display the desired behavior "but is unable to deal with competing forces—anger, frustration, fatigue." (Gable et al., 2009; p. 197). (This category can also include symptoms associated with anxiety or ADHD.) 	Students fitting this profile typically have difficulty managing their emotions (e.g., anxiety, anger) across settings and situations. However, if evidence suggests that emotional outbursts are linked to <i>specific</i> settings, situations, or tasks, the student may instead be attempting to escape or avoid those particular situations--suggesting poor academic skills or interpersonal difficulties.