

Problem Behaviors: Why Do They Occur? Educators can gain information to better understanding the cause of challenging behaviors by observing and talking with the student. The table below lists the *most common* reasons why a problem behavior is occurring:

Problem Behaviors: Common Reasons	
Hypothesis	Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LACK OF SKILLS. The student lacks the skills necessary to display the desired behavior (Gable et al., 2009). 	<p>If the student has never explicitly been taught the desired behaviors, there is a strong likelihood that behavior-skill deficit is a contributing factor.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PEER ATTENTION-SEEKING. The student is seeking the attention of other students (Packenham, Shute & Reid, 2004). 	<p>The student may be motivated by general attention from the entire classroom or may only seek the attention of select peers.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ADULT ATTENTION-SEEKING. The student is seeking the attention of adults (Packenham, Shute & Reid, 2004). 	<p>The student may be motivated by general attention from all adults or may only seek the attention of select educators.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESCAPE/AVOIDANCE OF A TASK OR SITUATION. The student is seeking to escape or avoid a task or situation (Witt, Daly & Noell, 2000). 	<p>Students with delayed academic abilities may find an academic task unpleasant and act out to avoid it.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LACK OF MOTIVATION. The student possesses the skills necessary to display the desired behavior but lacks sufficient incentive to do so (Gable et al., 2009). 	<p>Poor motivation is a real and frequent cause of behavior problems. The student may not see a 'pay-off' for doing the work.</p> <p>However, schools should first carefully rule out other explanations (e.g., skill deficit; escape/avoidance) before selecting this explanation.</p>
<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.) 	<p>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.</p>