



Building Bridges for Children's Mental Health

Behavioral Health Facts and Classroom Tips*

Managing Challenging Behaviors in the General Education Classroom

Pay Special Attention to

Students with challenging behaviors may become a target of other students. You may want to pay special attention to:

- Alienation and rejection from friends and other students
- Jokes and humor making fun of the person
- Other assumptions about the limitations of the student and his family
- Isolating or harassment by peers

Be aware that adults can unconsciously form and behaviorally express negative impressions of low-performing, uncooperative students. Try to monitor your impressions, keep them as neutral as possible.

Communicate a positive regard for the students and give them the benefit of the doubt, whenever possible.

Information for Parents & Teachers

Relationship Building:

- Establish parent and teacher communication early.
- Share any previous school challenges and support strategies.
- Involve families in decision making and emphasize shared responsibility.

Response to Intervention requires schools to partner more effectively with families. If you recognize a student's behavior as disruptive, start by approaching the student:

- Offer to help the student.
- Avoid power struggles and don't argue. Keep your voice low. Speak slowly.
- Understand your anger may escalate the situation.
- Remain strength based, even during constructive criticism and redirection.

Identify a private time to talk with the student about his behavior, to explore

- Is there something specific that we can do to help you listen more effectively?
- Would strategies like a non-verbal signal (e.g., chart on desk) help?
- Would a privacy break help the student regain self-control?
- Is there anything you would like to talk about with me or another staff member at school?

Contact the student's family:

- Build the relationship between school and home.
- Identify yourself and maintain us /we / partnership perspective
- Ask if it is a convenient time to talk for a few minutes. Reschedule a defined time as needed.
- Start out with a positive comment about the student.
- Describe the behavior or change in behavior.

Identify the Concern:

- Describe situation(s) which illustrate the concern – Be specific and backed up with data (how often have you seen this in the last few days?)
- Ask if the family has seen any of these behaviors at home.
- Ask if anything has changed recently or if the student has expressed concerns.

If the parent is not receptive:

- Offer to call back another time.
- Suggest school resources that could support the student.
- Offer to start a back and forth notebook.
- Ask parents what works at home.
- Ask the parent if there is some support they need.
- Ask parents if they would like to come in and observe.

If the parent is receptive:

- Explore ways to communicate and update behavior between home and school
- Consider a "Check-In / Check-Out" program where student meets with support staff at the beginning and end of the day
- Problem solve jointly - offer to meet at a convenient time for the family and discuss concerns in person



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* Behavioral Health refers to mental health and substance use disorders

Pro Active Instructional Strategies and Classroom Accommodations

- Systematically teach social skills including:
 - Anger management
 - Conflict resolution strategies
 - Appropriate assertiveness
 - Self-calming behavior.
 - How to self monitor their behavior
 - Identification of triggers and sensations when they feel their anger escalating
- Identify strategies for all students to deescalate.
- Create a 'quiet' place with in the room / school to calm down.
- Be discreet when a student needs to leave for a counseling appointment.
- Establish high and consistent structure in partnership with students: have students participate in the establishment of rules, routines, schedules, and expectations.
- Ensure families and students are clear on class rules. Rules should be few, fair, clear, displayed, taught, and consistently enforced. Be clear about what is nonnegotiable.
- Structure activities so the disruptive student is not always left out or the last one picked.
- Consider altering the class-seating chart.
- Encourage supportive group interactions: build relationships between student "groups."
- Use classroom greeters and peer buddies.
- It is essential that students be frequently reinforced for what we want them to do, rather than simply punished for what we do not want them to do:
 - Praise students when they respond positively.
 - Attempt to eliminate attention for negative behaviors.
 - Rewards will lose their reinforcing power quickly and must be changed or rotated frequently.
- Encourage parents to support their children in extracurricular activities and interactions with others.
- Teacher directed tasks are more effective than independent seat-work activities.
- Contact families personally and create volunteer and opportunities to visit the class available. Coordinate with home whenever possible.

Resources

Colorado Department of Education: Fast Facts,
http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/download/pdf/FF-EBP_MH_ADHD.pdf

Colorado Department of Education: PBIS,
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/pbis/>

Colorado Department of Education: RtI,
Family & Community Partnering: "On the Team and At the Table"
Toolkit <http://www.cde.state.co.us/rti/FamilyCommunityToolkit.htm>

Division of Behavioral Health, www.cdhs.state.co.us/dmh
Resource for mental health for all citizens of Colorado

Empower Colorado, <http://www.empowercolorado.com/>

**Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health ~
Colorado Chapter, <http://www.coloradofederation.org/>**

**Parent Education and Assistance for Kids (PEAK),
www.peakparent.org**

While it is important to respect a child's need for confidentiality, if you work with children or families, you are legally required to report suspected child abuse or neglect. According to CDE Guidelines, if you suspect possible abuse you are legally required to report your suspicions to the designated agencies immediately. This legal responsibility is not satisfied by merely reporting your suspicion to other school personnel.

Both a verbal and a written report are required. Please see a standard form for a written report in "Preventing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect", available at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprevention/pchildabuse.htm>

This fact sheet must not be used for the purpose of making a diagnosis. It is to be used only as a reference for your own understanding and to provide information about the different kinds of behaviors and mental health issues you may encounter in your classroom.

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