Approaches to Managing Challenging Behavior in Children

Joe Reichle, Ph.D
Quannah Parker-McGowan
Doctoral Student
Minnesota-LEND
“Behavior emitted by a learner that results in self-injury or injury to others, causes damage to the physical environment, interferes with the acquisition of a new skill, and/or socially isolates the learner”

Doss & Reichle (1991)
Prevalence: Challenging Behavior in Children

- Approximately 10-15% of all typically developing preschool children have chronic mild to moderate levels of behavior problems.
  (Campbell, 2005)

- Children who are poor are much more likely to develop behavior problems with prevalence rates that approach 30%
  (Qi & Kaiser, 2003)

- Challenging behavior has been among the top concerns of educators for over 20 years  (Rose & Gallup, 1995).

- The proportion of preschool children meeting the criteria for the clinical diagnosis of ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder) ranges from 7% to 25% of children in the United States, depending on the population surveyed.
  (Webster-Stratton, 1997)
Social and academic outcomes of problem behavior

- Children who are identified as hard to manage at ages 3 and 4 have a high probability (50:50) of continuing to have difficulties into adolescence (Campbell & Ewing, 1990; Egeland et al., 1990; Fischer, Rolf, Hasazi, & Cummings, 1984)

- Early appearing aggressive behaviors are the best predictor of juvenile gang membership and violence (Reid, 1993)

- When aggressive and antisocial behavior has persisted to age 9, further intervention has a substantially diminished chance of success. (Dodge, 1993)
Social and academic outcomes of problem behavior

What started getting us interested in preventing and intervening early with respect to problem behavior

• Early appearing aggressive behaviors are the best predictor of juvenile gang membership and violence (Reid, 1993)

• When aggressive and antisocial behavior has persisted to age 9, further intervention has a substantially diminished chance of success. (Dodge, 1993)
Young Children with Challenging Behavior

- Are rejected by peers
- Receive less positive feedback
- Do worse in school
- Are less likely to be successful in kindergarten
• Preschool children are three times more likely to be “expelled” than children in grades K-12 (Gillman, 2005)

• Faculty in higher ed early childhood programs report that their graduates are least likely to be prepared to work with children with persistently challenging behavior (Hemmeter, Santos, & Ostrosky, 2004)

• There are evidenced-based practices that are effective in changing this developmental trajectory . . . The problem is not what to do, but rests in ensuring access to intervention and support (Center for Evidence Based Practices: Young Children with Challenging Behavior)
Effects of toughened school discipline (Mayer, 1995)

- Increased vandalism
- Truancy
- Tardiness
- Aggression
## Forms of Challenging Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGGRESSIONS</th>
<th>TANTRUMS</th>
<th>SELF-INJURIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hitting</td>
<td>Crying</td>
<td>Scratching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scratching</td>
<td>Screaming</td>
<td>Biting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kicking</td>
<td>Whining</td>
<td>Pinching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biting</td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-choking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinching</td>
<td></td>
<td>Eye-gouging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Throwing objects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Avoid/Escape Undesirable Events

Obtain Desirable Events

Attention

Objects/Activities

Attention

Tasks/Events
Reinforcer

• A consequence provided after a response that increases the probability that the response will be emitted in the future

  ➢ Positive reinforcer
  Consequence is the delivery of a desired stimulus

  ➢ Negative reinforcer
  Consequence is the removal of an undesired stimulus
Intervention Strategies

- Honor (reinforce) the Function Served by Challenging Behavior, contingent on more socially acceptable form.
- Do Not Honor (do not reinforce) the Function Served by Challenging Behavior, but may dramatically alter conditions of engagement.
Positive Behavior Supports (PBS)

• An approach to understanding reasons for problem behavior that includes the design of interventions based on the individual’s behavior and the conditions in which the behavior occurs.

• The goal of PBS is to create long-lasting change.
Major Influences on PBS

- Behavioral psychology (Applied Behavior Analysis)
- Person-centered planning
- Self determination
- Inclusion
Key Features of PBS

- Ecologically Oriented
- Assessment Based
- Preventative
- Educational
- Inclusion Focused
- Comprehensive
- Team Based
- Long Term Based
- Respectful
Promoting Social and Emotional Competence within Early Education and Care Environments

Building positive Relationships with Children and Families

Preventative Practices

Social and Emotional Teaching Strategies

Intensive Individualized Interventions

Children at Risk

Children with persistent challenges
Functional Assessment

• A functional approach to assessment assumes that individuals behave in adaptive ways to ongoing changes in their environment.
Desired Outcomes of a Functional Assessment

1. A clear definition of the challenging behavior
2. Specification of persons, settings, activities, and other conditions that influence the occurrence and nonoccurrence of the CB
3. Identification of the reasons why the CB is produced

Selection of effective interventions based upon environmental variables
Functional Assessment

• Indirect assessments
  – Information from individuals who have extensive knowledge/experience with the child

• Direct observation
  – Directly observe the behavior(s) of interest.

• Environmental manipulations
  – Controlled comparisons of variables hypothesized to be related to the function of challenging behavior
Indirect Assessment: Summary

- questionnaires/rating scales, interviews, and checklists
- Requires less interventionist time and effort
- Offer less precision than more direct assess.
- May be sufficient for less complex behavior concerns
- Information obtained via indirect assessment should be validated through direct observation.
Direct Observation Assessment

Involves observing the child in his/her natural environment.

• Used to validate and supplement information obtained via indirect assessment including:
  – Description of the behavior
  – Triggers (antecedents) that provoke the challenging behavior.
  – Consequences associated with the behavior.
  – Hypothesis regarding the purpose (social function) that the child’s challenging behavior observes.
ABC Direct Observation

• Occurrence of challenging behavior triggers a diary entry
  – Behavior
  – What occurred immediately before the behavior? (antecedent)
  – What happened immediately following the behavior? (consequence)

• An analysis of the antecedents and consequences associated with the behavior of interest provide insight into the social function that the child’s challenging behavior serves.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Antecedent</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/28</td>
<td>8:00 – 8:30 Reading Center</td>
<td>Teacher reading to peers</td>
<td>Shoved peer</td>
<td>Teacher redirects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher redirects Ralph</td>
<td>Yelled</td>
<td>Teacher 1-1 reading with Ralph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:30 – 9:00 Small group sorting</td>
<td>Teacher leaves activity</td>
<td>Yelled</td>
<td>Peers laugh Teacher returns (works with group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher leaves activity</td>
<td>Yelled</td>
<td>Peers laugh Teacher returns (works with group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher leaves activity</td>
<td>Yelled</td>
<td>Peers laugh Teacher moves Ralph to her desk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Primary advantage
  – Information can be used to identify patterns of behavior that may suggest a social function that is maintaining the CB.

• Primary disadvantage
  – Data is primarily qualitative
  – Sometimes difficult to summarize
After reviewing data summary ....

What function does the challenging behavior serve the child? (i.e. why is it occurring?)

- Escape activity/object
- Escape attention
- Obtain activity/object
- Obtain attention
- Nonsocial function
Conducting Systematic Environmental Manipulations

What are they?
- Controlled comparisons of at least two different antecedents or two different consequences that are hypothesized to influence the emission of challenging behavior

Why should they be implemented?
- To clearly identify specific antecedents and/or consequences influencing challenging behavior that could not be isolated during direct observation
Manipulations of Easy and Hard

![Graph showing the frequency of aggressive behavior in sessions for Easy and Hard conditions.]

- **Easy Sessions:**
  - Frequency of Aggressive Behavior:Low

- **Hard Sessions:**
  - Frequency of Aggressive Behavior:High

**Sessions**

1. Easy
2. Hard
3. Easy
4. Hard
Environmental Manipulation Data: Comparing Assistance Vs. No Assistance

![Graph showing instances of aggression over sessions with and without assistance.]

- **Y-axis:** Instances of aggression
- **X-axis:** Session
- **Legend:**
  - Blue dots: No assistance
  - Gray squares: Assistance

The graph illustrates the difference in instances of aggression between sessions with and without assistance.
Setting Events

Physiological, social or environmental conditions, past or present, that can influence the likelihood of challenging behavior.

– Example:

  • *If Johnny is *not feeling well*, he is more likely to scream and kick when he cannot get his coat unzipped or hang up his backpack. He is also more likely to tantrum when asked to come to circle time.*
Examples of Setting Events

- Poor night’s sleep
- Illness
- Change in medications
- Missed meal
- Environment too hectic/crowded/demanding
- Environment too hot/cold
- Loud noises

- Change in routine
- Long wait time
- Change is staff or caregiver
- Surprise visits from people
- A fight with a peer or family member
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Event</th>
<th>Antecedent</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Maintaining Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absent</strong></td>
<td>The teacher tells the class to work on their math assignment.</td>
<td>Daniel raises his hand to obtain assistance from his teacher.</td>
<td>The teacher offers Daniel her assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present</strong></td>
<td>On the ride to school Daniel gets into an argument with his father about his homework (cognitive/emotional event).</td>
<td>Daniel throws his book to the floor. He places his head down on his desk.</td>
<td>The teacher offers Daniel her assistance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Types of Setting Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physiological</td>
<td>Pain or discomfort from illness or medication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive/emotional</td>
<td>Argument with friends/family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New social situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical environment</td>
<td>Loud noises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of light or too much light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Activity</td>
<td>Presented with a difficult task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change in the routine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Summarizing Setting Event Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Events</th>
<th>11/1</th>
<th>11/2</th>
<th>11/5</th>
<th>11/6</th>
<th>11/7</th>
<th>11/8</th>
<th>11/9</th>
<th>11/12</th>
<th>11/13</th>
<th>11/14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slept at least 9 hours</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offered choices in morning routine</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Downtime” before school</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showed signs of illness</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Setting Events: 0 4 0 0 1 4 0 1 2 4
Relationship between setting events and Eric's aggression during 30-minute morning freeplay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Setting events</th>
<th>Instances of Aggression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The graph shows a correlation between the number of setting events and instances of aggression, with peaks on 11/2, 11/8, and 11/14.
Intervention approaches for setting events

Setting event identified

Can setting event be eliminated?

Yes

Eliminate

No

Remove/modify immediate antecedent

Ameliorate influence of setting event

Adapted from Bambara and Kern, 2005
Individualized Supports for Students with Problem Behaviors
Intervention
Communicative Alternatives
General Rules in Implementing Communicative Replacement

• Don’t continue to reinforce the challenging behavior
• Try to minimize the probability that a challenging behavior is emitted prior to the emission of a socially acceptable communicative alternative
• If possible, select a communicative alternative that is already part of the learner’s existing communicative repertoire
• Determine how discriminable the use of the new communicative alternative needs to be
• Consider the natural maintaining contingencies offered by the natural environment
Teaching Rejecting - A socially acceptable act produced to escape/avoid contact with an undesired person, object, or activity

- Identify the earliest possible point at which individual attends to the approach of the undesired event without engaging in challenging behavior
- Reinforce the absence of challenging behavior in the presence of the undesired event
- Prompt or model the desired communicative alternative in the presence of the undesired event
- Shape successively better approximations or gradually reduce the learner’s reliance on response prompts
- Ensure that rejecting is used conditionally
Teaching Request a Break- A socially acceptable request to withdraw from an uncompleted task with the expectation of resuming engagement

- Determine the amount of engagement prior to an escape attempt.
- Just prior to arriving at this point, release the learner from the task.
- Once challenging behavior has diminished, prompt a request for a break at the critical point of engagement.
- After a correct response, the learner should be immediately released to a break activity. Near the end of the designated break activity, it may be necessary to have an inducement to get back to work.
Teaching Request a Break (Potential Problem)

THE LEARNER DOES NOT WANT TO RETURN FROM BREAK

- Identify one powerful reinforcer that will be delivered contingent on returning from break.
- Establish a more intermittent schedule of offering release from work without a request for a break.
- Remember to customize (by activity) the amount of work required prior to a break.
- Utilize behavioral momentum to establish reengagement
This strategy can be implemented when the interventionist is certain that providing unsolicited assistance reduces emission of challenging behavior.

Provide unsolicited assistance in presence of provoking activity in the absence of problem behavior.

Just prior to delivering unsolicited assistance, prompt a request.

Gradually fade prompts.

Ensure that requests for assistance are used conditionally.
Components of a behavior support plan

**Antecedent/setting event interventions**
- Modify or eliminate problem antecedent and/or setting events
- Introduce positive antecedents/setting events

**Alternative skill instruction**
- Teach replacement skills that serve the same purpose as the problem behavior
- Teach coping and tolerance skills
- Teach general skills to expand overall competence

**Responses to problem behavior**
- Reduce outcomes for problem behavior
- Provide instructive feedback/introduce logical consequences
- Develop a crisis management plan

Seek to alter:

- Components of Activities
- Behavior of Social Partners
- Sequencing/Choice of Activities
- Presentation of Activities
Tolerance for Delay of Reinforcement

Teaches the child to (a) remain engaged in a task/activity, or (b) wait for a desired object for increasingly longer periods of time.

Examples

❖ At the lunch table, the child begins to get fidgety. Teacher says, “Two more bites.”

❖ During story time, Margaret starts to complain that she wants to leave. The teacher says, “One more page.”
Tolerance for Delay of Reinforcement

Two different cues are used:

- **Delay cue**
  - Verbal, gestural, or graphic signal that communicates that the teacher will soon deliver reinforcement contingent on continued desirable behavior.
    - “Hang on”
    - “One more”
    - “In a minute”

- **Release Cue**
  - Verbal, gestural, or graphic signal that communicates the delivery or onset of reinforcement (i.e., release from task or delivery of preferred item or attention).
    - “We’re all done.”
    - “Okay, here you go”
High Probability Requests

A set of simple requests delivered just prior to a request for which the child typically does not comply.

Example: Alan will not sit in his chair when requested.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alan, give me five.</td>
<td>Gives teacher five</td>
<td>All right!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drops pencil. Pick That up for me.</td>
<td>Picks up pencil</td>
<td>Yeah!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is on your shirt?</td>
<td>Alan says, “Batman.”</td>
<td>Cool!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lets sit in your chair.</td>
<td>Alan sits in his chair.</td>
<td>Way to Go!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Variations on implementation

– Embedding (Premack Principle)

– Interspersed requests
Schedule

Uses a group of symbols (objects, pictures, written words) to represent the chronology of events across a period of time.
Schedule

• Identify a natural cue to signal the child to check his schedule.

• Identify a controlling prompt.

• Place symbol representing the targeted task on the schedule.

• Select time to recruit the child’s attention to check for task.

• Learner looks/takes symbol and travel to task\(\rightarrow S^{R+}\)

• Engages \(S^{R+}\)
Why do schedules work?

- Enhances predictability

- Provides choices for learner

- Gives learner control

- Provides the learner with attention
Why Are They Advantageous?

- Opportunities can be generated by the interventionist, rather than by challenging behavior.
- They may be less disruptive to the environment than reactive procedures.
- They are educative: New skills may be acquired in the absence of the frazzle that surrounds challenging behavior.
- Opportunities may be created that interrupt anticipatory chains of discriminative stimuli associated with challenging behavior.
- Do not have to deal with the behavior.
Why Are They Advantageous?

- Opportunities can be generated by the interventionist, rather than by challenging behavior.
- They may be less disruptive to the environment than reactive procedures.
- They are educative: New skills may be acquired in the absence of the frazzle that surrounds challenging behavior.
- Opportunities may be created that interrupt anticipatory chains of discriminative stimuli associated with challenging behavior.
- Do not have to deal with the behavior.
Schoolwide Support

• Nearly 25% of U.S. population is attending or teaching schools (Tyack, 2001)

• Schools:
  - deliver improved academic performance
  - build social competence
  - ensure safety

• Problem behavior is among top concerns in school (Horner, Diemer, & Brazeau, 1992; Gallup Poll, 2009)

• Antisocial behavior is increasing in schools (Skiba and Peterson, 2000)
Primary Prevention:
School-/Classroom-Wide Systems for All Students, Staff, & Settings

Primary Prevention:
School-/Classroom-Wide Systems for At-Risk Behavior

Secondary Prevention:
Specialized Group Systems for Students with At-Risk Behavior

Tertiary Prevention:
Specialized Individualized Systems for Students with High-Risk Behavior

CONTINUUM OF SCHOOL-WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

~80% of Students

~15%

~5%
Response to Intervention (RTI)

• Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tiered approach to help struggling learners.

• Students' progress is closely monitored at each stage of intervention to determine the need for further research-based intervention in general education, in special education, or both.
Tier 1: High-Quality Classroom Instruction, Screening, and Group Interventions

• All students receive high-quality, scientifically based instruction to ensure that their difficulties are not due to inadequate instruction.

• All students are screened on a periodic basis to establish an academic and behavioral baseline and to identify struggling learners who need additional support.
Tier 2: Targeted Interventions

• Students not making adequate progress in the regular classroom in Tier 1 are provided with increasingly intensive instruction.

• Interventions are provided in small-group settings in addition to instruction in the general curriculum.

• Students who continue to show too little progress at this level of intervention are then considered for more intensive interventions as part of Tier 3
Tier 3: Intensive Interventions and Comprehensive Evaluation

- Students receive individualized, intensive interventions.
- Students who do not achieve the desired level of progress are then referred and considered for eligibility for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004).
- At any point in an RTI process, IDEA 2004 allows parents to request a formal evaluation to determine eligibility for special education. An RTI process cannot be used to deny or delay a formal evaluation for special education.
Bullying

• Repeated actions directed at one person or group of people by one or more people
• Intentional negative action
  – Verbal
  – Physical
  – Relational
• Direct: words, push, shove
• Indirect: “Let’s walk by and not look at Sonovia.”
Bullying is misuse of power

- Both boys and girls engage in it
- Single individuals can bully, and groups or cliques can bully
- Bystanders have power to help and hinder
- 1 in 7 has been either a bully or the target of a bully (Nat’l Assoc. School Psychologists)
- 85% girls & 76% boys have experienced sexual harassment (AAUW Study)
- 62% of 6th grade boys w/ special health needs report physical assault on school property, vs. 49%/peers MN Student Survey/MDH
Consequences of Bullying

- Children who bully are at risk for more serious violent behavior—fighting, carrying a gun
  - Nat’l Inst. of Child Health & Human Development
- Bully/victims display highest level of conduct, school and peer relationship problems
- 60% or chronic bullies have arrest records in their 20’s (Olweus, Sweden)
- 38% of special ed students were bullied (Toronto Board of Ed)
- 23% of students bullied and 71% of teachers reported that teachers intervene often or almost always
  (Toronto Board of Ed study, from *The Bully the Bullied and the Bystander*)
Bystanders Study

- Peers are involved in 85% of bullying incidents.
- Peers reinforced the bullying in 81% of incidents.
- Peers were more respectful & friendly toward bullies than targets.
- Peers were active participants in 48% of incidents.
- Peers intervened in 13% of episodes.
- 87% of teens reject antigay bias; 5% intervene.
Features of School-wide PBS

• Procedures for family and community involvement

• Strategies for specific settings

• Strategies for targeted (at-risk) groups
e.g., academic supports, social skills groups

• Strategies for intensive, comprehensive individual supports