



MAY 2009

Are Your Child's Behaviors Challenging You and the School?

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"People's behavior makes sense if you think about it in terms of goals, needs, and motives."

Thomas Mann

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Joan Ryan's book, The Watergiver, will be available September 2009 and may be pre-ordered now through forms available here, on our website and in our office. Book Passage will call you when the books come in. 10% of the (pre-tax) book price will go to support Matrix services.

As Matrix approaches the end of our fiscal year in June we are working hard to reach the monetary goals that support our services. In this challenging year, we hope that you may find a way to help ensure no-cost services for Matrix families. Supporting Matrix financially, at whatever level is possible for you, will help us continue to educate, empower, and support families in our communities.

While parents can worry about a child's academic progress, behavior challenges can cause even more worry. Why are behavior issues sometimes more troubling? To begin with, behavior is there for others to see and difficult behaviors can get our children "in trouble" at school and in the community. And while strong emotions are often the cause of behavior issues, the resulting behaviors in turn stir strong, powerful emotions in us and in others. The end of the school year frequently seems to be the time when behavior problems increase. What can be challenging for is sorting out what is typical development and what may be related to our children's special needs. Understanding what your child's behavior is telling you and identifying how you and your child's educational team can address it are all important steps to help you better understand your child's needs while weathering the stormy sea of behavior challenges.

Understanding the Behavior

All behavior is telling us something; it is a form of communication. Behaviors serve a function and the challenge is to discover what that function may be and what your child is trying to tell you through his or her behavior. Is the behavior to avoid or protest something? To gain something? When a student or young child has difficulty learning or socializing, problem behaviors can be a reflection of their frustration. Years of such frustration and negative feedback can result in low self-esteem and may lead to psychological problems, thus it is important to understand what your child's behavior is telling you early on so you can help minimize these problems. The Great Schools article, Learning Disabilities and Psychological Problems in Children offers parents some red-flags to look for and helpful tips to address some of these concerns.

Behavior is also closely tied to the characteristics and symptoms of disabilities, such as those on the Autism Spectrum, Tourettes, ADHD, Depression, and Bi-Polar Disorder - these disabilities make it harder for students to display behaviors expected by others. Their unique differences can make it difficult for teachers and other students to understand their behaviors and make school challenging for them because they don't act like the typical student.

Learning How to Handle the Behavior

There is frequently no easy answer to address behavior challenges - it requires patience, understanding, and inquiry. Investigate what your child may be trying to tell you and educate yourself on ways to appropriately handle the behaviors he or she is demonstrating. The following links may prove helpful for this:

The Cycle of Tantrums, Rage, and Meltdowns in Children and Youth with Asperger Syndrome, High-Functioning Autism, and Related Disabilities

[Research papers by Tony Attwood](#), a well-known psychologist who has written many publications on Aspergers Syndrome

[Behavior Treatments for Children and Teens with ADHD](#)

[Behavior management and social skills for children with learning disabilities](#)

[Information on various emotional challenges](#)

[Using Choice and Preference to Promote Improved Behavior](#) by the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

The following organizations and their websites are also valuable resources:

[Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders](#)

[Foundation for Children with Behavioral Challenges](#)

[Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#)

### **How the School Can Address the Behavior**

If your child is in Special Education, the IEP team (which includes YOU the parent) must discuss and document in the IEP the answer to the question: "Does the student's behavior impede their learning or that of others?" If yes, then the IEP, depending on the severity of the behavior, should include a **Behavior Goal, Behavior Support** or **Positive Behavior Intervention Plan**.

Behaviors that can be addressed in a behavior plan are not restricted to those that "get the student in trouble". Behaviors that get in the way of learning can include: not paying attention; poor attendance; not completing assignments or poor organization; self-stimulatory behaviors.

Behavior plans are a pro-active, positive plan for what the school will do to: change the environment to minimize the problem behavior; teach a positive behavior that serves the same function as the negative behavior; reinforce or reward the desired behavior; and communicate with others about the plan.

Sometimes a school may want a behavior contract . This is NOT part of Special Education, and it is NOT the same as a positive behavior plan. Contracts state what the student is expected to do and includes consequences.

Learn more in the [Matrix Behavior packet](#). Another valuable resource is the [Behavior Plan Desk Reference](#). If a student's behavior challenges are severe the school must follow other procedures to support the student.

If behaviors result in disciplinary action at the school, it is time to re-visit the Behavior Plan. Call an IEP meeting. If the disciplinary action results in suspension or expulsion, this may trigger special requirements for students in Special Education. Take a deep breath and check out the Matrix Help Sheet: [Help! My child got suspended, what do I do?](#) and our [Discipline packet](#) for tips.

The following school-related links are also good resources:

[Positive Environments Network of Trainers](#) – Calif. Dept of Education

[Special Education Rights & Responsibilities \(SERR\)](#) has a chapter on Special Education related services-behavior and a chapter on discipline.

If your child is not in Special Education and there are ongoing behavior problems, the first step may be requesting an assessment by the school to determine if your child may be a student with a disability that

requires Special Education – see the [Matrix Assessment Packet](#) and [IEP packet](#) for more information on this. If your student has a 504 plan, a behavior support plan can be part of the 504.

When behaviors are challenging, we need to also manage our own behavior as what we do as parents can influence how our children behave. Sometimes we need someone else to give us feedback on our own behaviors or to offer us fresh suggestions on ways of effectively handling our children's behaviors. Taking deep breaths, finding ways to relax and staying involved in activities that make us feel good can make us more relaxed and rejuvenated for our children.

#### **DEVELOPMENT NEWS:**

Our deepest appreciation to everyone who supported our successful 2nd Annual Benefit Luncheon, especially our featured speaker, **Joan Ryan, author of *The Watergiver*** (Simon and Shuster, Sept. 2009), whose love for her son and honest self-appraisal inspires, educates, and helps us to see our common challenges and humanity. Many thanks to the following sponsors and supporters:

#### **SPONSORS**

**Sustainers:** Jennifer & Scott Fearon

**Mentors:** Kurt & Tammy Mobley; Liebe & Bill Patterson

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Thank you to **BOOK PASSAGE** in Corte Madera, which once again provided their lovely venue and did everything they could to help make our luncheon a success. Also, none of this would have been possible without the coordinated efforts of the members of the luncheon planning committee – THANK YOU!

Congratulations and thanks to everyone on the **Matrix Marin Human Race Team** and all those who supported them, including our wonderful Matrix Human Race Sponsors: Olympic Physical Therapy in Tiburon; Ben Franklin Press and Label in Napa; Drs. Doreen and Richard Cantor at Kaiser, SF; Marin Medical Pharmacy in Terra Linda; Swedish Auto Service in Novato; and Zenith Instant Printing in Novato.

#### **MORE USEFUL INFORMATION**

##### **New Support Groups:**

The **Matrix Asperger's Support Group** that meets in Marin will now offer two sub-groups: one for parents of high school students and young adults and the other for parents with younger students. We think this change will better address the different needs for each age group. Anyone interested in joining either group, please call Stephanie at 415.475.2121 or email her at [stephanies@matrixparents.org](mailto:stephanies@matrixparents.org)

**Research Studies:** Visit the [Time-Sensitive: News/Events/Advocacy section](#) of our website to learn about current research studies seeking participants, including a current research project on siblings of children with special needs. [Click here](#) for more information on this project.

**Attention Parents:** The 31st edition of the **Composite of Laws for Special Education** is now available and is available FREE to parents of children with special needs. [Click here](#) to download an order form.

##### **Great Resource:**

**NICHCY, the National Dissemination Center for**

**Children with Disabilities**, is an organization that serves the nation as a central source of information on: disabilities in infants, toddlers, children, and youth; IDEA, which is the law authorizing special education; No Child Left Behind (as it relates to children with disabilities); and research-based information on effective educational practices. [Click here](#) to read their April 2009 newsletter that highlights new and revised publications that are copyright-free or visit [their website](#) to learn more.

Matrix serves families in 4 counties: Marin, Napa, Solano and Sonoma, with offices in Novato and Fairfield.

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