



## School Discipline

Students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) who are disciplined at school are entitled to specific protections as provided in federal and state laws. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), federal implementing regulations and the California Education Code all spell out requirements related to students receiving special education services. Students who have not yet been made eligible for special education services MAY be entitled to the same protections under certain circumstances. It is important to note, regarding suspensions, students with disabilities who receive special education services generally are treated the same as their non-disabled peers. However, they cannot be suspended for longer than 10 consecutive days without this constituting a change of placement, necessitating an IEP meeting and a “manifestation determination.”

These terms and conditions will be explained in the documents included in this information packet. The laws and rules regarding the discipline of students with disabilities can seem complicated. However, remember that there is a process and sequence that must be observed by schools and by the IEP team when discipline results in removing a student from school.

If a student exhibits behavior that could result in discipline, the IEP team has a responsibility to address any concerns, preferably BEFORE a student becomes involved in a behavioral incident resulting in suspension or a recommendation for expulsion. At each annual IEP meeting, the IEP team must discuss whether a student’s behavior impedes their learning or the learning of other students. If the answer to the question posed is YES, then the team has an obligation to develop a positive intervention plan to address those concerns. Interventions can range from less formal and classroom based interventions to an extensive Functional Analysis Assessment (FAA) which will include specific interventions to be overseen by a behavioral specialist. Interventions should be positive and not punitive, with a goal of reducing the disruptive behavior and addressing student needs expressed through the behavior. Matrix has a separate information packet on **Behavior Issues and Special Education**, which explains behavioral assessments and behavioral intervention plans.

This packet provides a variety of materials and resources. Additionally, the Matrix Libraries in Novato and Fairfield have an extensive collection of disability related materials available to the community. Please call our office before coming. Matrix offers workshops for parents. Information is also available on our website: [www.matrixparents.org](http://www.matrixparents.org).

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## School Discipline Resources

### Websites

- Families and Advocates Partnership for Education 1-888-248-0822  
[www.fape.org](http://www.fape.org)
- National Information Center for Children & Youth With Disabilities 1-800-695-0285  
[www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org)
- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports  
[www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)
- Positive Environments, Network of Trainers  
[www.pent.ca.gov](http://www.pent.ca.gov)
- Protection and Advocacy 1-800-776-5746  
[www.pai-ca.org](http://www.pai-ca.org)
- Wrightslaw  
[www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com)

### Books

- *The Explosive Child: A New Approach for Understanding and Parenting Easily Frustrated, Chronically Inflexible Children*, Greene
- *From Emotions to Advocacy*, Wright [www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com)
- *No More Meltdowns: Positive Strategies for Managing and Preventing Out-of-Control Behavior*, Baker
- *Responding to Problem Behavior in Schools: The Behavior Education Program (Practical Interventions in the Schools)*, Crone, Horner, Hawken
- *Skills Training for Children with Behavior Problems, Revised Edition: A Parent and Practitioner Guidebook*, Bloomquist
- *Special Education Rights and Responsibilities*, CASE and PAI [www.pai-ca.org](http://www.pai-ca.org)
- *Straight Talk about Your Child's Mental Health: What to Do When Something Seems Wrong*, Faraone
- *Taking Charge of ADHD: the Complete Authoritative Guide for Parents*, Barkley
- *Understanding Your Child's Puzzling Behavior: A Guide for Parents of Children with Behavioral, Social and Learning Challenges*, Curtis
- *Why Johnny Doesn't Behave: 20 Tips and Measurable BIPs*, Bateman & Golly
- *Your Defiant Child: Eight Steps to Better Behavior*, Barkley
- *Your Defiant Teen: 10 Steps to Resolve Conflict and Rebuild Your Relationship*, Barkley and Robin

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## Overview of Disciplinary Procedures for Students with Disabilities

### What to Do When Your Child Gets Suspended

When your child gets in trouble at school, you can feel overwhelmed, panicky, and desperate for answers. But stop and breathe. There are things you can do and there is a sequence of events that must take place. A few things to think about immediately:

- Does your child have an IEP? If so, special rules (laws) apply. Learn about those rules which are described below.
- Does your child understand the school rules? This is an important factor in determining the consequences for your child's behavior. If your child has an IEP that question should have been asked and answered on the IEP document. Talk to them about what happened and see if they understood the school's rule about their behavior. If your child does not have an IEP it is still important to discuss whether or not they understood what they did was wrong.
- If your child has an IEP, does your child also have a Behavior Support Plan (BSP) or Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)? If so, the plan needs to be reviewed and considered in light of the behavior that resulted in the discipline action. Was the plan appropriate, was it being implemented? For more information, please review the Matrix packet "**Behavior Issues and Special Education.**"
- How long will your child be suspended? This makes a difference in terms of what options will be available. Children with or without IEPs can be suspended for violating school rules, and suspensions cannot be more severe for a student with a disability than for a non-disabled student.
- Has your child been suspended before during the current school year? If so there may be a pattern that needs to be taken into consideration. It is important to know the total number of days that your child has been suspended for the current school year. Once a child with an IEP is suspended for 10 days in a school year, certain protections will be triggered. Those are described below.

### Important Facts About the Steps in School Discipline

#### SUSPENSIONS:

Students with disabilities are generally treated the same as other students when they violate the school's code of conduct. In other words, if a student gets in a fight with another student and the usual consequence is suspension from school for 5 days, then a student with a

disability who has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) could be suspended in the same manner. The difference is that a student with an IEP (and sometimes students who may be eligible for an IEP) have limits on how many days they can be suspended before legal safeguards and protections are triggered. Some of the requirements:

- During the first 10 days of suspension the student is not entitled to instruction, either as a general education or a special education student.
- In California, no student can be suspended for more than 20 days without this triggering other action.
- A student with an IEP may not be suspended or removed from school for more than 10 consecutive school days, and sometimes 10 cumulative school days, without a “manifestation determination” which is when the IEP team determines if the behavior is related to the student’s disability, or a “manifestation” of the disability.
- If a student with an IEP is suspended for longer than 10 school days, the school must provide the student with educational services that provide the student with “a free, appropriate public education” even if the student is not in their current placement as stated in the IEP.
- If a student is repeatedly suspended for the same or similar behavior, this may constitute a pattern of behavior and those suspensions may be considered a change in the student’s placement which would necessitate convening the IEP team for a manifestation determination.

NOTE: In the case of both suspensions and expulsions, these penalties are to be imposed with any student only when there is a finding that “**other means of correction fail to bring about proper conduct**” [California Ed Code sections 48900.5 and 48915(b)(1)]. The exception to this condition is when the behavior involves actual or attempted physical injury to another, possession or sales of drugs (with the exception of possession of less than one ounce of marijuana) or possession of a weapon. These offenses require suspension and in some cases expulsion.

### **Length and Location of Suspensions:**

- A teacher, principal or superintendent may suspend a student for any offense that is listed in the California Education Code (Section 48900).
- A teacher may suspend a student for no more than 2 days.
- Suspension by a principal requires an informal conference with the student within 2 days of the suspension. School officials must make every effort to notify the parent at the time of the suspension. Schools are permitted to establish policies regarding conducting a conference with the student’s parent.
- Suspensions longer than 5 days require a determination by the superintendent that the student’s presence at school poses a danger or a threat of disruption.
- Students may receive an “in school” suspension (time in suspension occurs at school). If the suspension consists of simply sitting in the principal’s office it is considered a day of

suspension. If the student receives instruction as specified in an IEP, but in a different location, it is not considered a day of suspension.

### **Manifestation Determinations:**

Within 10 school days of a suspension of a student who is being considered for expulsion, the student's IEP team, including the parent, must meet and review all relevant information to determine:

1. "If the conduct in question was caused by or had a direct and substantial relationship to, the child's disability; or
2. If the conduct in question was the direct result of the local educational agency's failure to implement the IEP."

If the IEP team determines that either of the above two situations apply, the conduct is considered to be a manifestation of the child's disability. The reasoning is that a child should not be punished for manifesting or displaying their disability. At that point the student will not be subject to discipline in the same manner as a child without a disability.

If you as a parent disagree with a determination by the rest of the IEP team that the behavior was in fact NOT a "manifestation" of your child's disability, you need to state that on the Manifestation IEP form and you should indicate if you want to appeal that decision. If you do, that should be stated in writing, and an expedited due process hearing will be scheduled. This means that a state administrative hearing officer will conduct a hearing on this issue and the hearing needs to be "expedited," or held within 20 school days of your request. If you are appealing the school's determination that the behavior is NOT a manifestation of your child's disability, you want to file the appeal as soon as possible, and definitely prior to the district's expulsion proceedings before the School Board's administrative panel or the School Board itself. The school needs to provide you with information on how to file the appeal.

### **IEP team decision: Not a Manifestation of Disability**

If there is a determination that the conduct IS NOT a manifestation of the disability then the student is subject to the same discipline as a non-disabled student. It should be noted that in IDEA 2004 the criterion for making this determination was changed. The school can proceed with their decision even if you disagree, unless you file an appeal as described above.

### **IEP team decision: Is a Manifestation of Disability**

If there is determination that the conduct/behavior IS a manifestation of the student's disability the IEP team must:

1. conduct a functional behavioral assessment and implement a behavioral intervention plan, provided an assessment was not conducted previously.
2. review and revise as necessary a behavior intervention plan that was in place at the time when the conduct in question occurred.
3. return the student to the placement from which he was removed (except under special circumstances). If the parent and district agree, the placement can be changed as part of the behavior intervention plan.

### **Special Circumstances:**

Students may be removed by school staff to an appropriate Interim Alternative Educational Setting (IAES) for not more than 45 school days without regard to whether the behavior is a manifestation of the disability, if the student:

1. Carries a weapon to or possesses a weapon at school, on school premises, or to or at a school function.
2. Knowingly possesses or uses illegal drugs, or sells or solicits the sale of a controlled substance, while at school, on school premises, or at a school function.
3. Has inflicted serious bodily injury upon another person while at school, on school premises, or at a school function.

### **Children Not Yet Eligible for Special Education:**

If a student has not been made eligible for special education services, he may still be afforded the protections of special education students during disciplinary proceedings if it can be demonstrated that the local educational agency had knowledge that the student is a student with a disability prior to the behavior. The district has knowledge if:

1. the parent expressed concern in writing to school personnel that their child is in need of special education services; or
2. the parent has requested in writing an evaluation for special education eligibility; or
3. the teacher or other school staff expressed "specific concerns" about "a pattern of behavior" demonstrated by the child, and these concerns were expressed directly to the special education director or other supervisory personnel.

If you request that your child be assessed for special education eligibility AFTER the conduct in question, that assessment must be expedited, but the student is to remain in the placement determined by school authorities, including suspension of services.

## EXPULSIONS:

The legal procedures for expulsions are quite detailed. However, it should be noted that:

- Only a school governing board can expel a student, although the board may appoint an administrative panel or hire a hearing officer to hold the hearing where evidence is presented by the school and by the student.
- When a district decides it wants to expel a special education student, the rules regarding Manifestation Determinations (described above) apply: an IEP team manifestation review must be held within 10 days; the team considers any relevant information in the student's file, including an IEP, teacher observations and any relevant information provided by the parent; the team decides whether:
  1. the conduct in question was caused by, or had a direct and substantial relationship to, the child's disability; OR
  2. the conduct in question was the direct result of the district's failure to implement the IEP, including a Behavior Support Plan.
- Pending expulsion proceedings, as of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of a student's removal from school, educational services must be provided in order to allow the student to progress in the general curriculum and to make progress toward achieving their IEP goals.
- An expulsion hearing is to be held within 30 school days of a determination by the school principal that an expellable offense has been committed and the school wishes to move forward with expulsion.
- The school board must establish rules regarding the expulsion process (how the expulsion hearing is conducted) that conform to the law. The California Education Code, sections 48900 and forward, describes these requirements.
- An appeal of a School Board decision can be appealed to the County Board of Education within 30 days of the expulsion order.

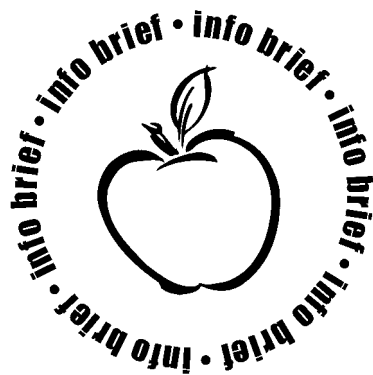
For further information on expulsions contact Protection and Advocacy, Inc. ([www.pai-ca.org](http://www.pai-ca.org)) 1-800-776-5746 or Legal Services for Children ([www.lsc-sf.org](http://www.lsc-sf.org)) 415-863-3762. Additionally, Wrights Law at [www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com) has many articles on discipline, behavior, and functional behavioral assessments under the topic "Behavior & Discipline."

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# Positive Behavior Supports and Functional Assessment of Behavior

reprinted from *Families and Disability Newsletter*  
 Beach Center on Families and Disability, University of Kansas  
 with an introduction by Janet Vohs, PEER



## Introduction

When the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) was amended in 1997, two key provisions related to positive behavioral support were enacted. First is a requirement that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team address behavior of students when it impedes their or other students' learning. IEP teams are to consider strategies, including *positive behavioral interventions*, to address the behavior.<sup>1</sup>

The second provision requires schools to conduct a *functional behavioral assessment* and implement a *behavioral intervention plan* if it has not already done so for students who have been disciplined. If the student already has such a plan, it

must be reviewed, and, if appropriate, revised.<sup>2</sup>

This *PEER Information Brief* is one of two that discuss positive behavioral approaches.<sup>3</sup> This *Brief*, with information reprinted with permission from the *Families and Disability Newsletter* (Winter 1997),<sup>4</sup> focuses primarily on the implications of the new IDEA

<sup>2</sup> Students have a right to a *functional assessment* and *positive behavioral support intervention* if they are disciplined for weapons, drug violations, or for other reasons, and the intervention must address the behavior for which they are punished (20 U.S.C. 1415 (k)(1)(B)). As a practical effect of this provision, students may be able to acquire interventions that will prevent them from being disciplined and placed in a highly restrictive setting.

<sup>3</sup> The *PEER Information Brief* "Effective Discipline Policies and Practices: A Schoolwide Approach," by Diana MTK Autin, discusses the concepts of positive behavioral support as they apply to shaping systems and settings that foster responsible, desirable behaviors conducive to learning as opposed to systems that rely on exclusionary, punitive approaches.

<sup>1</sup> As one of the special factors the IEP team must consider: "...for a student whose behavior impedes his or her or others' learning, appropriate strategies, including *positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports*, to address that behavior[.]" (Emphasis added.) IEP development, 20 U.S.C. 1414 (d)(3)(B)(I).

<sup>4</sup> The *Families and Disability Newsletter* is published by the Beach Center on Families and Disability at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. The PEER Project gratefully acknowledges the Beach Center for granting permission to reprint here the articles on "Positive Behavioral Support" and "Functional Assessment of Behavior" as well as items for the "Resources" section.





requirements as they apply to individual students, especially students with more complex, significant disabilities whose behaviors present extreme challenges. Nevertheless, the general principles and strategies are widely applicable.

Many parents and advocates view the emphases on positive, supportive approaches as a revolutionary shift in the public policy approach to students with challenging behavior. Essentially the shift is one from control and suppression of behavior to support for learning new skills and adopting positive behaviors. The shift is based on the belief that all behavior is purposeful, and often has a communicative intent. From this perspective, it is possible to begin to understand the intent of undesirable behaviors, and to identify effective supportive strategies for changing behavior.

This Brief is organized into the following sections:

## **Positive Behavioral Support**

First Steps, Strategies, and Monitoring Improvement.

## **Functional Assessment of Behavior**

Strategies for how to examine and understand the purpose of the behavior.

## **Resources**

### **PEER**

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## **Part 1: Positive Behavioral Support**

Have you ever heard the phrase, “Treat the symptom, ignore the disease”? Many people handle discipline that way. They try to eliminate disruptive or dangerous behavior without looking into why the behavior occurred.

Positive behavioral support is different—even revolutionary—because it is based on asking “Why?” Why does Pat never seem to sit in his seat at school? Why does Richard bang his head repeatedly? Why does Anastasia wander off?

Behavior usually happens for a reason. For example, an individual may use it seeking attention or self-stimulation. Behavior can be a form of communication—particularly for people with limited language capabilities—that may express frustration, anxiety, physical pain, other emotions, or needs.

When students throw objects in the classroom, they may be expressing a need for attention. Yelling may be their way to get out of an assigned task. Or they could be exhibiting challenging behavior because they feel excluded or overly controlled.

If you think about it, challenging behavior does work—to a certain degree. People do get more attention, higher levels of physical contact, or escape from work. But disruptive behavior (such as aggression) interferes with inclusion: It can endanger the person exhibiting it and others, upset staff, and contribute to a negative attitude toward people with disabilities.

Then get rid of the challenging behavior, right? Not so simple. One goal in positive behavioral support is not merely to “eliminate” but to understand the behavior’s purpose. The individual can then learn to substitute a more positive behavior that achieves the same function. People learn better ways to make their feelings and needs known.

### **First Steps**

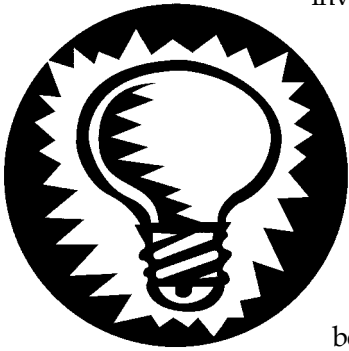
Just as in beginning any project, first obtain the necessary materials. In positive behavioral support, this involves making sure this approach is right for your family, gathering the people you need, having an idea of what you want, and finding out what purpose the challenging behavior serves.



**Ensuring fit with your values.** If you use this approach, you will have to be ready to forge ahead (rather than waiting for others to take the lead). You will also have to be prepared to custom-fit the plan to the person you are focusing on. This is not a “one size fits all” type of plan. And, instead of accepting whatever happens, you must be ready to actively solve problems, even anticipate them. This approach, too, focuses on rewarding good behavior, not punishing challenging behavior. Keep these values in mind when deciding whether this approach will work with your family.

### **Putting together a collaborative team.**

You probably could do this approach by yourself. But the odds for success would not be in your favor. A better way is to



involve family, professionals, friends, and community members. Those sensitive to the culture, skills, routines, and values of the individual and family are ideal. Also, find those who can best work with the child. Rapport—the ability to “connect”—can often be the miracle ingredient in behavioral changes.

**Creating a vision.** This approach is not an overnight, silver bullet cure. It takes time and effort. A vision of the ideal life for the individual with challenging behavior will fuel and help guide the journey. Typically, this vision begins with shared great expectations and incorporates to the maximum extent possible that individual’s preferences for inclusive activities, relationships, and daily/weekly routines.

**Completing a functional assessment.** Challenging behaviors do not happen repeatedly without reason. Finding out “why” the behavior occurs is the key to positive behavioral support. Technically, the finding-out process is known as *functional assessment* and is a method of collecting and testing information. After you identify and clearly define the challenging behavior so that any one observing would know exactly what you are talking about, check to make sure you are on target about the probable purpose(s) of the behavior (for instance, to quit doing a difficult task). This can be done by someone who has knowledge of the person or by technical experts.

## Strategies

Now, the next phase in this model of positive behavioral support begins: Strategies to encourage behavioral changes. These include (in no particular order):

**Teaching new skills.** Challenging behavior often occurs because the individual does not know a more appropriate way to achieve a result. Determine necessary skills, then work together to encourage their development. Just as importantly, decide whether people working with the person who has the behavioral challenge need to learn new skills. If so, they, too, need to start acquiring new skills.

The new skill may successfully replace the behavior right from the start or it may take longer. When a flare-up does occur, ignore the behavior problem (in cases of physical injury, it may be impossible and unethical to ignore behavior) and introduce known methods that promote good behavior.

**Appreciating positive behavior.** Gathering information for the functional assessment caused you to focus on the individual. During that time you should have learned what the person views as rewards. Using those rewards when the person exhibits targeted positive behavior reinforces the likelihood that those behaviors will happen again. At the same time you concentrate on rewarding targeted behavior, remember to recognize other appropriate behavior and work toward encouraging the individual to have a positive identity.

**Altering environments.** If something in the person’s environment influences the

challenging behavior, it is logical to organize the environment for success. When adjusting the environment, focus, too, on what happens between challenging behavior incidents as well as on what happens when challenging behaviors occur. Arranging what happens during the day, when it happens, and how it happens decreases the chance of challenging behavior. The goal of the positive behavioral support model presented here is not to avoid all places where challenging behavior might occur or simply to give in to all the individual's requests. Rather, the goal is to create a rich pattern of preferred activities and relationships that encourage desirable rather than undesirable behavior.

**Changing systems.** After working on the immediate environment, examine your system of services to see whether it is as responsive and personalized as possible. If not, do what you can to make it that way. Teachers can, for instance, request time for collaborative planning on behalf of the student with challenging behavior. A parent can explain positive support practices to school representatives. You may find that despite your efforts, the system is not changing directions or quickly enough for your family. In that situation, you may consider literally changing your system for another (e.g., changing schools).

**Monitoring Improvement**

As the support program develops, devise a recording system to find out what works and what doesn't. There will be fine tuning and changes along the way. If the initial plan is not working, take care to understand why it is not working. You can then use that

information to design a new approach for the plan.

For example, a person can get bored doing the *same* tasks with the *same* people for the *same* rewards at the *same* time of day. Creating variation may solve this problem. The second roadblock is that the people overseeing the positive behavioral support may get bored and less responsive to the person and his or her communication efforts. Taking a break and adding variety helps get past this roadblock.

In some situations, you may find that in spite of your best efforts, the behavior was not affected. Ask yourself whether you gave the plan enough time, or if you or others criticized the person exhibiting the behavior or pled with the person to behave well. Both tactics can actually increase the challenging behavior. Positive behavioral support also may not be effective in self-injury that gives the child sensory stimulation (e.g., children may poke their own eyes to make a visual effect), or is in response to not enough or too much stimulation. Self-injury or aggressive behaviors also can be initiated or set off by underlying psychiatric conditions, such as depression, obsessive-compulsive disorders, or other disorders. Some scientists have even suggested that some self-injury may represent a type of addictive behavior that gives a "high."



**Crisis Anticipation**

Also necessary from the start and throughout is a plan that anticipates dangerous situations. When someone has a behavioral challenge that results in property

destruction, self-harm, or physical injuries, you can't be caught unaware. Devise a detailed, word-by-word script for how to respond to dangerous situations and distribute it to everyone in contact with the individual. Not only will this foresight increase the plan's effectiveness, it will provide support persons with a security blanket.

### End Results

Positive behavioral support draws from teaching, systems design, behavior

management, and social support to frame environments where people succeed and feel good about themselves. The results of this evolving approach support the independence, productivity, and inclusion of people with disabilities.

However, as one mom said, "Employing positive behavioral support is not like tightening a few nuts and bolts. It is about relationships as much as techniques. It always matters who does the intervention as much as what they do."

## Strategies to encourage behavioral change:

**Teach new skills.** Sometimes challenging behaviors occur because students do not know more appropriate ways to express themselves or to get the results they want. By acquiring new skills, the individual can successfully replace the behavior. Staff may also need to learn new approaches and skills.

**Appreciate positive behavior.** Once you know what is rewarding to the person with challenging behaviors, use those rewards to recognize appropriate behaviors. Broaden the focus beyond the targeted behavior to reward other appropriate behavior. Help the individual shape a positive identity.

**Alter environments.** Organize environments for successful change by creating a rich pattern of preferred activities and relationships that encourage desirable behaviors.

**Change systems.** Parents and teachers have important roles to play in shaping systems to be responsive and personalized.

**Monitor improvement.** Devise a recording system to find out what works and what doesn't. If the plan is not working, find out why. Be sure to give the plan enough time to work. Be willing to design a new approach if necessary.

**Anticipate crises.** Devise a specific plan to respond to difficult situations and distribute the plan to everyone in contact with the individual. This foresight increases the plan's effectiveness and provides support persons with a security blanket.

## **Part 2: Functional Assessment of Behavior**

The functional assessment is a foundation of behavioral support. It is not a medical diagnosis that comes with a prepackaged plan. Instead, the functional assessment’s results let caregivers design an environment that “works” for people with communication and behavioral challenges. In this model, the person with the challenges and those who best know the person collaborate with a person trained in behavioral analysis. Together, they plan how to meet the challenges of problem behavior.

Functional assessment methods look at the behavioral support needs of people who exhibit the full range of challenging behaviors, such as self-injury, hitting and biting, violent and aggressive attacks, property destruction, and disruptive behaviors (e.g., screaming or tantrums).

Those who exhibit challenging behaviors may be labeled as having a developmental disability, autism, mental retardation, mental illness, emotional or behavioral disorder, traumatic brain injury or may carry no formal diagnostic labels at all. These individuals vary greatly in their overall support needs and ability to communicate and participate in their own behavioral support.

Information about when, where, and why challenging behavior occurs builds effective, efficient behavioral support, because unplanned strategies can make behaviors worse. Also functional assessments are mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act for use by Individualized Education Plan (IEP) teams addressing

behavioral concerns. Many states, too, have laws or regulations stipulating the need for a functional assessment before permitting significant behavioral interventions. The observations may find out that behavior strategies aren’t necessary. Instead, the behaviors may have a medical cause. Allergies, infections, menstrual cycle effects, toothaches, chronic constipation and other medical conditions may bring on challenging behaviors. Medication also can influence behavior.

Generally, a functional assessment:

- Clearly describes the challenging behaviors, including behaviors that occur together;
- Identifies the events, times, and situations that predict when the challenging behaviors will and will not occur across the range of daily routines;
- Identifies the consequences that maintain the challenging behaviors (what the person “gets out” of the behaviors, e.g., attention, escape, preferred items);
- Develops one or more summary statements or hypotheses that describe specific behaviors, specific types of situations in which they occur, and the reinforcers that maintain the behaviors in that situation; and
- Collects directly observed data that support these summary statements.



A functional assessment can be done in many ways and at different precision levels depending on the behavior. A person who has observed undesirable behavior in

different situations and concluded that “she does that because...” or “he does that in order to. . .” has also developed a summary statement about the variable-influencing behavior.

A complete assessment allows confident prediction of the conditions in which the challenging behavior is likely to occur or not occur and when there is agreement about the consequences that perpetuate the challenging behavior.

Functional assessment methods usually fall into three general strategies:

### **1. Information gathering (interviews and rating scales).**

This method involves talking to the individual and to those who know the individual best. It also consists of formal interviews, questionnaires, and rating scales to identify which events in an environment are linked to the specific problem behavior.

Questions to answer include:

- What challenging behaviors cause concern?
- What events or physical conditions occur before the behavior that increase the behavior’s predictability?
- What result appears to motivate or maintain the challenging behavior?
- What appropriate behaviors could produce the same result?
- What can be learned from previous behavioral support efforts about strategies that are ineffective, partially effective, or effective for only a short time?

### **2. Direct observation.**

Teachers, direct support staff, and/or family members who already work or live with the person observe the person having challenging behaviors in natural conditions over an extended period. The observations must not interfere with normal daily environments. In most cases, observers record when a problem behavior occurs, what happened just before the behavior, what happened after, and their perception as to the function of the behavior. When an observer collects 10-15 instances of the behavior, he or she might discover where a pattern exists.

### **3. Functional analysis manipulations.**

Taking the assessment one step further is the functional analysis. In this process, a behavior analyst systematically changes potential controlling factors (consequences, structural variables, i.e., task difficulty or length) to observe effects on a person’s behavior.

These determinations involve creating situations that will reduce, eliminate, or provoke the challenging behavior to test whether the hypothesis is correct. Functional analysis—expensive in time and energy—may be the only way, in some cases, to ensure an adequate assessment. It is the only approach that clearly demonstrates relations between environmental events and challenging behaviors. To support the functional assessment, also consider measuring activity patterns (the variety and degree of community integration and relationships).

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**Behavioral support must be conducted with the dignity of the person as a primary concern.**

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This portion of the *Information Brief* was reprinted from an article prepared by *The Family Connection* which was adapted with permission from O'Neil, R. E., Horner, R. H., Albin, R. W., Sprague, J. R., Storey, K., & Newton, N. S. (1997). *Functional assessment and program development for problem behavior. A practical handbook*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

*The Family Connection*, under the directorship of Rob Horner (University of Oregon), the Research and Training Center (RRTC) on Positive Behavioral Support, conducts research on the causes of challenging behaviors and strategies for support. It is a program funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research of the U.S. Department of Education. The Beach Center on Families and Disability at the University of Kansas (3111 Haworth, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045, 785-864-7600) takes the researchers' work and gets it to families in as many ways as possible.

The PEER Project thanks the Beach Center on Families and Disability for permission to reproduce and distribute these guidelines.

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For more information on positive behavioral support, contact:  
**Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support**  
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 Eugene, OR 97403-5262  
 541-346-2505 phone • 541-346-5689 fax  
 pbis@oregon.uoregon.edu  
 www.pbis.org

## Resources

Demchak, M., & Bossed, K. Assessing problem behaviors. (1996). *Innovations*, 4. American Association on Mental Retardation, 444 N. Capitol St. NW, #846, Washington, DC 20001.

DeVault, G., Krug, C., & Fake, S. Why does Samantha act that way?: Positive behavioral support leads to successful inclusion. (1996, September). *Exceptional Parent*, 26, 43-47. (Prepared by Family Connection Staff).

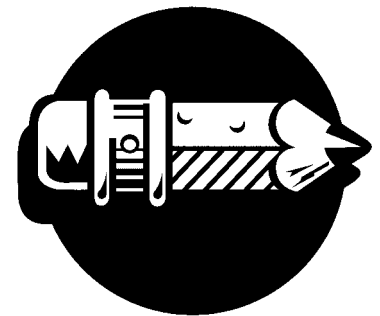
Foster-Johnson, L., & Dunlap, G. (1993). Using Functional Assessment to Develop Effective, Individualized Interventions for Challenging Behaviors. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 25, 44-50. To order, call 888-232-7733. Ask for JTEC253.

*Guidelines: Effective behavioral support.* Pennsylvania Dept. of Education: Bureau of Special Education. Free. Call 717-523-1155, x213 to order.

Koegel, L. K., Koegel, R. L., & Dunlap, G. (Eds.). (1996). *Positive Behavioral Support: Including people with difficult behavior in the community*. Baltimore: Brookes. \$37.95. Call 800-638-3775 to order.

Lovett, H. (1996). *Learning to Listen*. Baltimore: Brookes. \$37.95. Call 800-638-3775 to order.

O'Neill, R.E., Horner, R.H., Albin, R.W., Sprague, J.R., Storey, K., & Newton, J.S. (1996). *Functional Assessment of Problem Behaviors: A practical assessment guide*. 2nd edition. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole. \$31.95. Call 800-354-9706 to order.



# NICHCY Connections... to Behavior Assessment, Plans, and Positive Supports

Launched March 16, 2004

Links regularly updated

Approx. 6 pages when printed

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NICHCY is pleased to connect you with sources of information for helping children who have behavior challenges. This particular *Connections* page is one of many focusing on behavior issues. That's because "behavior" is such a huge topic. We've divided the subject up into separate pages to make digesting it more manageable! The separate behavior pages are as follows:

- [Behavior Expertise](#)
- Behavior Assessment, Plans, and Positive Supports (you're here!)
- [Behavior at Home](#)
- [Behavior at School](#)
- [Bullying](#)

If you want all of these separate pages rolled up into one resource you can print out, photocopy, and share with others, we've combined them all into: [Behavior: The Works](#).

This *Connections* page focuses on *Behavioral Assessment, Plans, and Positive Supports*. Without a doubt, a critical first step in addressing problem behavior is determining **why** the student is exhibiting the behavior. To do so, a behavior assessment must generally be conducted. Only when more is known about the cause or causes of the student's behavior can appropriate positive supports be identified and provided.

The list below isn't intended to be exhaustive of the behavior resources available---it's ever-growing. We'll be adding to this page constantly, so check back often to see what's new! We'll mark new entries with a .

## Behavior as Communication

- *Why does my kid do that?*  
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/behaviorprob\\_qt/assessing\\_motivation.pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/behaviorprob_qt/assessing_motivation.pdf)  
This document helps you find the reasons behind misbehavior in children.

- *What does defiant behavior mean?*  
[www.pbs.org/parents/issuesadvice/inclusivecommunities/challenging\\_behavior.html](http://www.pbs.org/parents/issuesadvice/inclusivecommunities/challenging_behavior.html)  
PBS offers many resources for parents of children with disabilities, including this brief called *Challenging Behavior in Children*.
- *Behavior serves a purpose.*  
<http://cecp.air.org/familybriefs/>  
The Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice (CECP) offers a number of family briefs on behavior, but if you want to know more about how behavior is a form of communication and why some children choose inappropriate behaviors as a way of communicating, try CECP's brief called *Functional Communication Training to Promote Positive Behavior*. A natural follow-up is CECP's brief called *Planned Ignoring as an Intervention Strategy for Parents and Family Members*.
- *What are children trying to tell us?*  
<http://csefel.uiuc.edu/briefs/wwb9.html>  
*What Works* briefs from the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning summarize effective practices for supporting children's social-emotional development and preventing challenging behaviors. This 4-pager talks about functional behavior assessment and how it's used to figure out the purpose or function of a child's problem behavior--in effect, what the child is trying to say. Spanish version is available at: <http://csefel.uiuc.edu/briefs/wwb9-sp.html>
- *More on the function of behavior: Achieving the purpose in appropriate ways.*  
<http://ici2.umn.edu/preschoolbehavior/strategies/genintro.htm>  
The Early Childhood Behavior Project offers many materials on challenging behavior, including this *Introduction*. Also extremely interesting---and useful---is the project's page on ways to provide the child with an appropriate communication alternative that will achieve the original purpose of the problem behavior. Find this latter information at: <http://ici2.umn.edu/preschoolbehavior/strategies/default.html>
- *Is this behavior normal, a phase, a development issue, or something more serious?*  
[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/childbehaviordisorders.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/childbehaviordisorders.html)  
Family members and teachers may see a range of behaviors out of children and still not be sure if a particular behavior they're seeing indicates a childhood behavior disorder. Visit Medline Plus's page, which connects with various resources to help you decide, including *Development and Behavior; You and Your Child's Behavior; Children's Threats: When Are They Serious?*; and specific aspects, such as *aggressive behavior; children who won't go to school; conduct disorders; fighting and biting; helping the child who is expressing anger; and know when to seek help for your child*.

## Behavior Assessment

- *So what exactly is a Functional Behavioral Assessment?*  
[www.air.org/cecp/fba/default.htm](http://www.air.org/cecp/fba/default.htm)  
This page answers the basic questions of "FBA: What is it?" It covers how to conduct and FBA, and how to use the results to create a positive behavioral intervention plan and supports. The information is broken down into digestible sizes and is easy to read and consume.
- *Another quick description of FBA.*  
[www.pbis.org/english/Functional\\_Assessment\\_of\\_Behavior.htm](http://www.pbis.org/english/Functional_Assessment_of_Behavior.htm)

- *Details about the process involved in FBA.*  
[www.aboutourkids.org/aboutour/letter/novdec02.pdf](http://www.aboutourkids.org/aboutour/letter/novdec02.pdf)  
This 6-page newsletter defines the process of FBA. It gives clear descriptions and specific examples. A great, reader-friendly overview!
- *Here's another reader-friendly overview.*  
[www.pacer.org/parent/php/php-c79.pdf](http://www.pacer.org/parent/php/php-c79.pdf)  
FAPE is the Families & Advocates Partnership for Education. Although the project is no longer in operation, its 8-page brief on functional behavioral assessment and positive behavioral interventions is still available online. So is the Spanish version, at:  
[www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c79s.pdf](http://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c79s.pdf)
- *Take a look at this review of research on Functional Analysis of Problem Behavior.*  
<http://seab.envmed.rochester.edu/jaba/articles/2003/jaba-36-02-0147.pdf>  
This research review was originally published in *Applied Behavior Analysis* in Summer 2003.
- *What is "Multimodal Behavior Analysis"?*  
<http://mfba.net/index.html>  
The Duquesne University School Psychology Program provides a thorough description of the process of conducting a Functional Behavioral Assessment and writing a Behavior Intervention Plan.
- *What do they mean by "strength based assessment"?*  
[www.air.org/cecp/interact/expertonline/strength/empower/1.htm](http://www.air.org/cecp/interact/expertonline/strength/empower/1.htm)  
This method of assessment empowers child by building on their personal strengths and resources, rather than focuses on their problems.
- *The IEP team is definitely involved!*  
The IEP team might find these two resources helpful in understanding FBA and what comes next: (1) An IEP Team's Introduction To Functional Behavioral Assessment And Behavior Intervention Plans (available at: [www.air.org/cecp/fba/problembehavior/main.htm](http://www.air.org/cecp/fba/problembehavior/main.htm)); and (2) Conducting a Functional Behavioral Assessment (available at: [www.air.org/cecp/fba/problembehavior2/main2.htm](http://www.air.org/cecp/fba/problembehavior2/main2.htm)).

## Behavior Intervention Plans

- *The link between functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans.*  
<http://ericec.org/digests/e592.html>  
Research has demonstrated that FBAs can lead to the development of effective, proactive BIPs. Find out more in this digest from the ERIC system.
- *How do you go about developing a behavioral intervention plan?*  
[www.ldonline.org/article/6180](http://www.ldonline.org/article/6180)  
This article explains the requirements of the IDEA regarding addressing problem behavior. It provides a step-by-step guide to conducting a functional behavioral analysis, and writing a behavior plan.
- *Writing the plan for school involves the IEP team.*  
<http://cecp.air.org/familybriefs/>  
The Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice (CECP) offers a number of family briefs on behavior. Two were mentioned above under "Behavior as Communication." If you'd like to know more about how to write a BIP, read CECP's *Behavioral Planning*

*Meetings*, which describes what BIPs are and how parents and the school system work together to write one.

- *Suppose the IEP team doesn't know much about behavior, FBA, or BIPs?*

<http://cecp.air.org/fba/problembehavior/main.htm>

If the IEP team isn't real sure how to address a student's problem behavior, then members might find this CECP resource helpful: *Addressing Student Problem Behavior, Part I: An IEP Team's Introduction to Functional Behavioral Assessment and Behavior Intervention Plans*. It's available at the link above. Also to the point is *Creating Positive Behavioral Intervention Plans and Supports*, available at:

[www.air.org/cecp/fba/problembehavior3/main3.htm](http://www.air.org/cecp/fba/problembehavior3/main3.htm)

- *Would a sample form help?*

[www.circleofinclusion.org/english/formsarticles/forms/10challengingbehavior/form10index.html](http://www.circleofinclusion.org/english/formsarticles/forms/10challengingbehavior/form10index.html)

The Circle of Inclusion (for early childhood service providers and families of young children) offers a number of sample "Forms to Support a Child with Challenging Behaviors." These include: (1) a behavior log; (2) a blank behavior intervention program; (3) a sample behavior intervention program; (4) an environmental and curricular checklist; (5) social skills training; and (6) problem behavior analysis.

## Positive Behavior Support

- *What exactly is Positive Behavior Support?*

[www.nau.edu/ihd/positive/ovrvw.html](http://www.nau.edu/ihd/positive/ovrvw.html)

This excellent, reader-friendly guide to Positive Behavior Support is provided by Institute for Human Development at Northern Arizona University. A Spanish version is available at: [www.nau.edu/ihd/positive/sumario.html](http://www.nau.edu/ihd/positive/sumario.html)

- *What are the components of Behavioral Support?*

[www.state.ky.us/agencies/behave/homepage.html](http://www.state.ky.us/agencies/behave/homepage.html)

This site offers information on a 3-tier model of behavior support: (1) school-wide, (2) small group, and (3) individual. It gives information on what all students need to be successful.

- *Positive behavior support and functional assessment .*

<http://ericec.org/digests/e580.html>

This digest from the ERIC system looks at the research on positive behavior support and school-wide behavior change, then briefly discusses functional assessment of young children.

- *What's the research say about PBS?*

<http://ericec.org/osep/recon4/rc4cov.html>

This issue of *Research Connections in Special Education* describes promising research in using positive behavioral supports to improve learning opportunities for students with disabilities.

- *Positive behavioral interventions and supports.*

[www.ldonline.org/article/6035](http://www.ldonline.org/article/6035)

This article from LDOnline explains why PBIS is important and outlines key principles of practice.

- *More about PBS and its individualized approach to managing challenging behavior.*  
<http://csefel.uiuc.edu/briefs/wwb10.html>  
This *What Works* brief from the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning summarizes PBS and talks about how it works, factors that will limit its effectiveness, and whether it's really just "giving in" to the child. A Spanish version is available at:  
<http://csefel.uiuc.edu/briefs/wwb10-sp.html>
- *Tips for parents: How to get behavior supports into the IEP.*  
[www.pbis.org/files/parentiep.doc](http://www.pbis.org/files/parentiep.doc)  
This guide, a collaboration between the Beach Center on Disabilities and the Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, contains a wealth of suggestions for parents.
- *Need training materials for parents on positive behavioral interventions?*  
[www.fape.org/pubs/idea\\_training\\_materials.htm#POSITIVE](http://www.fape.org/pubs/idea_training_materials.htm#POSITIVE)  
These training materials, subtitled *Parents Need to Know*, include 37 overheads and a curriculum for trainers. The set is available in Spanish as well and on CD-ROM.

## Yet More Resources

- *There's a center focusing exclusively on PBIS.*  
[www.pbis.org/english](http://www.pbis.org/english)  
The Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to provide information, training, support, and guidance to the nation on addressing behavior problems in research-based and effective ways. They offer information in English and in Spanish.
- *Check out this one-stop-shop on behavior!*  
[www.bridges4kids.org/PBS/PBS.html](http://www.bridges4kids.org/PBS/PBS.html)  
This site has info for both families and teachers on FBAs, behavior intervention plans, bullying, and discipline issues.
- *Don't forget to check out the other NICHCY A-Z pages on behavior.*  
[www.nichcy.org/resources/default.asp](http://www.nichcy.org/resources/default.asp)  
They're listed and linked at the top of this file, and offer quick connections and resources on other behavior-related issues.

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NICHCY *Connections* pages are published in response to questions from individuals and organizations that contact us. We encourage you to [share your ideas](#) and feedback with us!

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