

School Behavior Management for Children with Down Syndrome

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Brian Belden, PhD

Cy Nadler, PhD

Division of Developmental & Behavioral Sciences, Children's Mercy Kansas City
Department of Pediatrics, University of Missouri – Kansas City School of Medicine



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Objectives

- Discuss foundational principles for behavior management and teaching
- Apply basic principles to real-life student and classroom situations across the age range
- Connect with resources for behavior and educational planning for children with developmental differences



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Developmental Delays in Early Childhood

- Attention & executive functioning
- Cognitive functioning
- Communication, speech, language
- Social/emotional skills
- Motor
- Self-help

What could possibly go wrong?



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Common Behavior / Skill Targets

- Limited communication repertoire
- Pre-academic or academic problems (e.g., trouble with matching, imitation; learning difficulties in reading, math, etc.)
- Poor social skills
- Tantrums & poor frustration tolerance
- Noncompliance
- Aggressive behavior
- Rigid adherence to routines / trouble with transitions and change
- Inappropriate, annoying, and dangerous behaviors
- Self-injurious behaviors
- Hyperactivity
- Poor attention & organization
- Poor self-care skills (toileting, dressing, etc.)



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Implications

- Tremendous variability – Strategies will likely need to be tailored to the individual child
- Typical teaching and management techniques must often be adjusted to meet student needs
 - Don't take any "typical" childhood skills or behaviors for granted
 - High risk of both skill *and* performance (motivation) deficits
- Basic principles of learning still apply [but the teaching **targets** may be unfamiliar]
 - Massed practice with precise, meaningful feedback
 - Shaping abilities gradually
 - Using motivation to build skills and reduce problem behaviors



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Principles of Behavior Management and Teaching



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Examples of Evidence-Based Behavioral Interventions

- Structure and routines
- Visual supports (schedules, rules, instructions, etc.)
- Clearly defined rules and expectations
- Specific prompts and commands
- Modeling, role-play and practice of skills and appropriate behaviors
- Clear, immediate, and meaningful performance feedback
- Positive reinforcement (praise, activities, treats, etc.)
- Point Systems, sticker charts and token economies
- Planned ignoring of minor misbehavior
- Brief time out
- Brief privilege losses



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Strategies that *don't* work... (but that most parents and teachers try)

- Warning over and over again about disciplinary consequences
- Only planning on how to react to the problem after it occurs
- Talking more and more; relying on explanations and reasoning
- Getting louder, more emotional, and threatening
- Stacking up consequences when behavior doesn't change
- Frequently changing the rules
- Placing the child in an unnecessarily restricted environment to avoid the problem



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Behavioral Intervention

- Applied Behavior Analysis = The science of how learning and behavior change takes place
 - "ABA" often refers to intense, structured one-on-one teaching based on the principles of applied behavior analysis
- Behavioral intervention may also be called:
 - Positive behavioral supports
 - "BIPs"
 - Classroom behavior management
 - Behavior modification
 - Behavior therapy
 - Behavioral parent training (e.g., PCIT)
 - Operant conditioning
 - Etc.



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Behavioral intervention in a nutshell:

- *Intentional* teaching of appropriate behaviors and skills that replace, disrupt, or compete with problem behaviors and skill deficits
- Providing motivation and supports for children to learn and use appropriate behaviors and skills consistently



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Why is it so hard to develop effective behavioral interventions?

1. Kids are the ones who get to pick what's reinforcing and punishing, and kids can be confusing!
 - "Rewards" you provide may not actually reinforce (encourage) the child's good behaviors
 - Attempts to "punish" may accidentally reinforce the child's problem behaviors
2. Kids can also be unrealistic!
 - What they may wish to achieve (to gain or to avoid) may be inappropriate or outlandish, and therefore difficult to compete with
3. Adults can also be unrealistic!
 - If the correct behavior is outside the child's repertoire, we need to pick a more realistic target and help teach the child the new behavior

What can we do about this? → Identify the **function** of the behavior

- What's "driving" the behavior?
- What's the outcome goal of engaging in the behavior?



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Functions of Behavior

The function of most behaviors usually fit into 1 of 4 categories:



1. Attention: When behavior is engaged in to get others' attention



2. Escape: When behavior is engaged in to get out of something



3. Tangible: When behavior is engaged in to access something tangible



4. Automatic: When engaging in the behavior itself makes us feel good or makes us feel not as bad.



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Attributions That Are Not Functions of Behavior

- Emotional states:
 - Anger, Anxiety, Mania, etc
 - E.g., "Johnny hit **because** he was angry"
- Physical states:
 - Tired, hungry, etc.
 - E.g., "Anna had a tantrum **because** she didn't sleep well last night"
- Internal Motives:
 - "Johnny hit to **get** revenge"
 - "Johnny **doesn't want** adults to control him"

These kinds of setting events and descriptions may be **accurate**, but they do not focus on the consequences that **encourage and maintain** the behavior problems.



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Behavioral Assessment

To determine the function (purpose) of a problem behavior, start with the "ABCs"

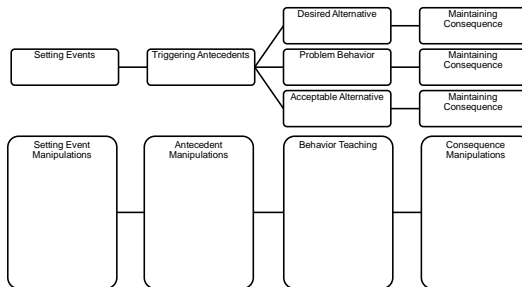
- Antecedent
 - What "guarantees" that the problem will occur?
 - When, where, and with whom does it occur?
- Behavior
 - What does the behavior "look" like?
 - How often does it happen?
 - How intense is the behavior? How long does it last?
- Consequence
 - What happens when the problem occurs?
 - What does the child gain from engaging in the problem behavior?



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Behavioral Supports Flow Chart



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Behavioral Intervention Categories

- Setting Event Manipulations
 - Modify the distal environment to ensure support of...
 - Basic physical needs (hunger, sleep, pain, etc.)
 - Basic social/emotional and behavioral needs (predictable environment, loving caregivers, etc.)
- Antecedent-Focused Interventions
 - Modify the immediate environment so that...
 - Problem behaviors are less likely to occur (increase motivation, modify the environment, etc.)
 - Availability (or unavailability) of reinforcement is signaled (via verbal prompts, visuals, etc.)
- Behavior/Teaching-Focused Interventions
 - Create pro-active teaching & learning opportunities to improve the needed skill or strengthen an existing alternative behavior
 - Identifying a "positive opposite" and engaging in massed practice to gradually teach it
- Consequence-Focused Interventions
 - Provide meaningful feedback by increasing contrast between the consequences of behaviors
 - Reinforcement (encouragement) for specific desirable behaviors
 - Absence of reinforcement (ignoring) for specific problem behaviors
 - Punishment (discipline) for specific undesirable problem behaviors



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Setting Event Manipulations

Physical

- Poor sleep
- Hunger
- Illness
- Pain
- Unpleasant stimulation
- Health problems

Environmental

- Presence/absence of key people
- Changes in routine
- Indirect conflict (e.g., between parents)
- Direct conflict
- Unknown stresses



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Indicators of influencing events or situations

- Predictable change in expected behavior when the situation occurs.
- Fairly sudden changes in expected behavior.
- Unexplained variability in behavior when the antecedents and consequences are fairly consistent.



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Correcting situations or events that influence behavior

Physical

- Physical examination
- Consistent sleep schedule
- Sleep clinic referral
- Mealtime schedule
- Nutrition referral
- Sensory evaluation

Environmental

- Maintain routine across people and places
- Forewarn changes
- Learn to resolve conflict in a healthy way
- Manage parental stresses
- Provide connection to important absent people



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Antecedent Approaches

- Modify the environment and setting conditions

- Everything that can go wrong...
- Increase clarity of signals (prompts) in the environment
- "Stack the deck" for motivation



Ready to Work



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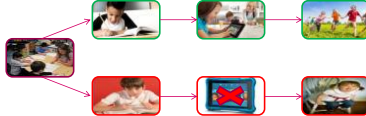
MORNING ROUTINE



BEDTIME SIMPLE CONTINGENCY



CONTINGENCY MAP



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Response Prevention



- For behaviors that are "high stakes" because:
 - Intensity of behavior poses significant danger to self or others (aggression, SIB; destruction of property, etc.)
 - Frequency and/or context of behavior makes it difficult or impossible to monitor or anticipate (high and/or low-rate; natural environment)
 - Result of behavior is difficult or impossible to recover from

NOTE: Other antecedent, teaching and consequence-based interventions can and should be used as well!



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Behavioral Toolbox

- **Reinforcement:** Increasing the likelihood of a behavior by providing a desired outcome when the skill or correct behavior occurs
- **Punishment:** Decreasing the likelihood of a behavior by providing an undesired outcome or removing a desired outcome when the problem behavior occurs
- **Shaping:** Gradually "raising the bar" by reinforcing behaviors that increasingly resemble the end-goal
- **Prompting:** Adding support (instruction, reminder, visual, etc.) to increase the likelihood of the correct behavior
- **Prompt Fading:** Gradually removing prompts and temporary supports once a behavior is well-established
- **Extinction:** Withholding reinforcement whenever a behavior occur



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Reinforcement and Punishment (i.e. Consequences)

Reinforcement: Anything that increases the likelihood that a behavior will happen

- Behavior + Reinforcement = More Behavior
- What "drives" or motivates the behavior, what is the student hoping to achieve by doing the behavior?
- E.g., Receiving preferred things; Removing non-preferred/aversive things

Punishment: Anything that decreases the likelihood that a behavior will happen

- Behavior + Punishment/consequence = Less Behavior
- E.g., Receiving unpreferred/aversive things; Removing preferred things



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Reconsidering Reinforcement

Reinforcement is often considered the same as "giving rewards"....



...and yes, we use external reinforcement to motivate kids to behave appropriately.....



"First complete your work, then we can go to recess"



...but reinforcement is a feedback tool – We use it to help students learn and use skills that help them be successful



"That's right! That's how you spell ____"

"Great job! You used your card to ask for a break!"



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Reconsidering Punishment

The word punishment usually has a negative connotation...



and yes, students definitely don't like getting punished and are motivated to avoid it.....



...but punishment is also a useful feedback tool – We discourage specific behaviors that prevent kids from being successful.

"That's close, but quite not right. 6-2 doesn't = 3... 6-2=4"



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Establishing Motivation

- Most critical element for any behavioral intervention

– Without control over motivation, behavior change is unlikely

– Categories to consider:

- Praise/attention
- Activities, toys, food, privileges, etc.
- Escape from work and aversive conditions
- Automatic/sensory

– Evaluating (and re-evaluating) preferences can improve the power of your behavioral intervention

- "Choosing with their feet" – formal and informal assessment of preferences
- Reinforcement "menus" and rotating options to prevent boredom



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Establishing Motivation

- In selecting potential reinforcers, consider:

– Relative value of the available options

- "Minimum wage" options may be insufficient (especially at first)
- Interests ebb and flow – Be ready!
- Remember, you are competing with "secret option # 3"

– Awareness of availability

– Contingencies for access – At first:

- Set the bar LOW!
- Minimal delay between behavior and reinforcement delivery
- 1:1 reinforcement schedule



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Token Systems



Time	8:00-8:30	8:30-9:00	9:00-9:30	9:30-10:00
Did I stay Safe?				

Get 3 out of 4 stickers to play a game in the Library!



-10
 -5
 -1



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Don't Underestimate the Power of Attention

- Adults reserve their attention for problem behavior and generally ignore good/neutral behavior

- Reversing this involves:

- Paying a LOT of attention to good/neutral behavior
 - Praise, description, imitation; positive touch
- Reducing emotional responses to problem behavior
 - "Planned ignoring" of minor misbehavior
 - Predictable responses to misbehavior that cannot be safely ignored
- Maintaining a very high ratio of positive to corrective interactions



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Attention-Maintained Problem Behaviors

- When considering how to respond "in the moment" ...
 - Is a response necessary?
 - Will a response be counter-productive?
 - What are the constraints of your physical space, time, and district/building policies?
- Remember:** Interventions like timeout (removal of attention) require that the child have access to "time IN" (lots of attention)



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Shaping Behavior

- Shaping behavior means gradually building a skill
 - Start with small challenges, then building up
 - Avoid trying to do too much too fast
 - Set small goals along the way to the big goal
 - Exercising that "muscle" often – Frequent practice is key!!
 - Rewarding progress along the way, as well as at the end

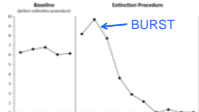


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Behavior Reduction

- Always start with improving motivation and teaching**
 - Adaptive behaviors can compete with behaviors that are not dangerous but do interfere with learning or social interaction
- Un-ignorable behaviors may require a planned response
 - Brief
 - Non-harsh
 - Predictable
 - Always in the context of a reinforcement-rich environment
 - Justified by data and monitored for unintended consequences
- Remember what happens when you change environmental contingencies...



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Using Function to Inform Intervention

Attention vs. Tangibles/Activity vs. Escape/Avoid vs. Automatic

Is there an appropriate way for the child to access reinforcement...

Noncontingently? (regardless of the child's behavior)

Examples: Free access to a toy during class, scheduled breaks, providing attention every 2 minutes

Contingently? (based on the child's behavior)

Examples: Praise and encouragement for following directions, Break earned after 3 work tasks, Computer earned for no aggression during circle time



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What do I do for _____? (Form vs. Function)

Hit vs. Kick vs. Scratch vs. Pinch vs. Gouge vs. Pull Hair vs. Throw Objects



Attention vs. Tangibles/Activity vs. Escape/Avoid

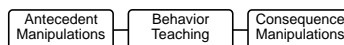
(What did they get?)



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Real-Life Applications of Behavioral Principles



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Flop & Drop

- Possible Functions
 - Get attention (can't ignore when child flops in the parking lot)
 - Avoid or escape an activity
 - [or both]
- Possible interventions
 - Preteach walking with an adult and compliance
 - Differential attention
 - Outwait the child
 - If you have to move the child, do so with minimal attention
 - Super charged motivation

Prevention is critical! Dragging is NOT the answer. Teach children when they are young (and small) to comply with "get up."



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High Activity Level: Possible Functions

- To get something...
 - Bight shiny object
 - Commotion (cause & effect)
 - Internal - It feels good (trampoline effect)
- To get attention
- To avoid the "work" of sitting still!
- Often multiple simultaneous functions



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High Activity Level: Preteach

- Walking from point A to point B
- Stop (red light-green light)
- Staying with leader
- Acceptable alternate behavior (hold onto a rope)



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High Activity Level: Antecedent Manipulation

- Change the setting
 - Teacher walks beside child
 - Child is line leader
- Prompt the desired behavior
 - Visual (e.g. picture of walking)
 - Child demonstrates desired behavior (e.g. shows how to walk holding onto rope)



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High Activity Level: Consequences

- POSITIVE
 - Frequent reinforcement
 - High value reinforcement
- PUNISHMENT
 - Positive practices
 - Sit down



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We've done all that, and he's still wild.

- Evaluate for co-existing condition
 - ADHD
 - Anxiety
 - Dysregulated mood
- Refer to physician for consideration of Rx



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Tantrum During Transition: Possible Functions

- To get something (i.e. continue activity)
- Avoid something
- To get attention



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Replacement Behaviors

- Aim for targets that are
 - Incompatible with the problem behavior
 - Functional alternatives
 - Discontinue work by earning a break vs. flipping the desk
 - Access toys via verbal request vs. aggression
 - Receive attention for correct answers vs. complaining
 - "Within reach" of the current repertoire



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Behavior Take Practice!

- Through massed practice, master the building blocks of "learner behaviors"
 - Sit for longer & longer periods of time
 - Attend when prompted
 - Accept hand-over-hand guidance, touch prompts, and corrective feedback when necessary
 - Imitation, matching, compliance, and other pre-academic skills
- Easy, impulsive, often-reinforced behaviors can gradually be replaced with adaptive responses (developing a new habit!)



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Tantrum During Transition: Antecedent Manipulation

- Prompt the correct response
 - Video recorded social story
 - Contingency map
 - Verbal



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Tantrum During Transition: Shape the behavior

- Start with a low value stop activity and a high value start activity.



- Gradually increase the value of the stop activity and decrease the value of the start activity.



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Tantrum During Transition: Consequences

- POSITIVE
 - Return to the preferred stop activity
 - Other high value reinforcement
- PUNISHMENT
 - Restrict access to any preferred activity
 - Time out



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Aggression: Possible Functions

- To get attention
 - For the reaction (cause & effect toy)
- To obtain something tangible
- To avoid something
- Note: "To communicate that I'm mad" is not a behavioral function... but aggression/mad behaviors may produce **attention** (comfort, reactions, help calming down), **tangibles** (objects/places) and/or **escape** from frustrating things and negative feelings



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Pre-Teaching Critical Skills

- "Waiting for the problem to happen" is never an effective behavior plan



- Pre-teaching or practicing before the problem:
 - Allows practice when everyone is calm
 - Provides repetition behaving the "right way"
 - Builds understanding of the correct behavior
 - Teaches student a new (appropriate) way to earn the reward



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Aggression: Teach desired alternative

- How to play
- Separate and use words when mad
- High interest cause-and-effect toys
- Ask other child for desired item



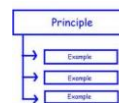
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Functional Communication Training

- Teaching children that specific behaviors (vocalizations, manual signs, picture icons, iPad buttons, etc.) have specific meanings
 - Structured & unstructured approaches (discrete trial vs. incidental teaching)
 - Requires substantial practice, shaping, etc.
 - Dependent on motivation (start with what the child wants)
- Requires a plan for generalization across:
 - Location
 - Time
 - Person
 - Target

picture exchange



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Aggression: Antecedent manipulation

- Environmental changes
 - Coach classmates in how to respond
 - Adult stay near-by in high risk situations
- Prompt desired response
 - Video recorded social story
 - Visuals
 - Classmates



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Aggression: Consequences

- Negative
 - No reaction to hitting
 - Time out followed by practice
 - Reprimand from peers
- Positive
 - Adult Praise
 - Peer recognition



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Social Skills are...

- Critical to a child's academic success
- Critical for children to cope with (and enjoy) the school environment
- Life skills / values that are taught to every other child in school



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Social Skills = Social Behaviors

- Verbal behaviors
 - Engaging in back-and-forth, shared conversations
 - Staying on topic
 - Decoding social language (pragmatics)
- Nonverbal behaviors
 - Use (and decoding) of eye contact, gestures, body language
- Activity preference
 - Joint engagement in leisure / school activities ("playing and working together")
 - Mutual decisions to spend time in proximity with other students ("friendship")



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What should "social skills training" look like?

- The same behavioral framework for good teaching applies to social skills training!
 - Modify the environment to reduce the likelihood of problems and prompt appropriate behaviors
 - Create **pro-active** teaching & learning opportunities to improve the needed skill or strengthen an existing alternative behavior
 - Provide meaningful feedback to the learner



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Poor Independent Work: Probable Functions

- Get attention
- Avoid doing the work



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Set the Stage for Compliance

- "Behavioral momentum" can be generated with a series of instructions that are easy, desirable, and highly-likely to be followed
- Provide ample attention/praise for compliance with easy instructions and work tasks
 - Then, issue a demand that is less likely to be followed
- Over time, can help develop a compliance "habit"



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Teach desired behavior

- Sustain effort when teacher is not present

Prompt desired behavior

- Visual contingency
- Timer

Reinforce with attention



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When things don't go as planned...

1. Is the child motivated? Is that motivation powerful and sustained? Are you using a function-based approach?
2. Does the child understand the contingencies in your intervention? Immediate, consistent, repeated exposure may help.
3. Are there ways you can provide better signals to the child to help create contrast between the right and wrong behaviors?
4. Are you targeting the right behavior? Is there a missing skill that needs to be taught?
5. Consult!!

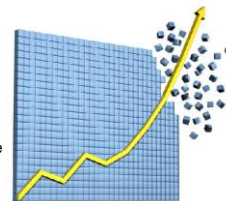


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Know the Individual Child

- Won't make eye contact
- Starts hand-flapping
- Whines
- Pushes the pencil away
- Perseverates on asking to leave
- Falls out of his chair
- Yells and screams
- Tries to run off
- Hits you and head-butts when block the door
- Bangs head against the floor until you physically restrain



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Final Points

- Motivation is the key to managing problem behaviors and teaching new skills
- Interventions should focus on teaching appropriate behaviors
 - Gradually, rewarding effort and small successes
 - LOTS of practice with clear feedback on performance
 - In the context of a supportive teaching environment
- Teaching cannot occur exclusively in one setting
 - Plan for generalization by teaching in relevant locations, coordinating with parents and others to support goals across settings [also known as *homework*]



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Final Points

- Systematic teaching is more effective
 - Functional assessment
 - Operationalized plan
 - Data collection on outcomes
- If an intervention is failing:
 - Reconsider the child's motivation and ability to behave differently
 - Use a team approach – consult with each other, outside behavioral supports, physicians, parents, etc.



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Thank You!

- Brian Belden, PhD
 - bbelden@cmh.edu
- Cy Nadler, PhD
 - cnadler@cmh.edu

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Educator Resources

- National Down Syndrome Society Educational Resources – <http://www.ndss.org/Resources/Education/>
 - ECSE through Age 21
 - Inclusion issues
 - College & postsecondary options
- Down Syndrome Education USA - <https://www.dseusa.org/en-us/>
- Down Syndrome Education Online - <https://www.down-syndrome.org/resources/>
- Organization for Autism Research "Curriculum in a Box," including educator's guide to Autism and resources for teaching students
 - <http://www.researchautism.org/resources/CurriculumInABox.asp>
- The National Professional Development Centers on ASD – <http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/>
- Teachers pay Teachers - <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/>

Additional Local and National Resources

- National Down Syndrome Society: <http://www.ndss.org/>
- Nebraska Parent Training and Information - <http://pti-nebraska.org/>
- Nebraska DHHS: http://dhhs.ne.gov/developmental_disabilities
- DS Alliance of the Midlands: <http://www.dsamidlands.org/>
- DSAF of Nebraska: [ww.dsafnebraska.org](http://www.dsafnebraska.org)
- Munroe-Meyer Institute: <http://www.unmc.edu/mmi/>
- Special Education Advocacy: <http://www.wrightslaw.com/>
- Family Center on Technology and Disability: <http://www.fctd.info/>

Books

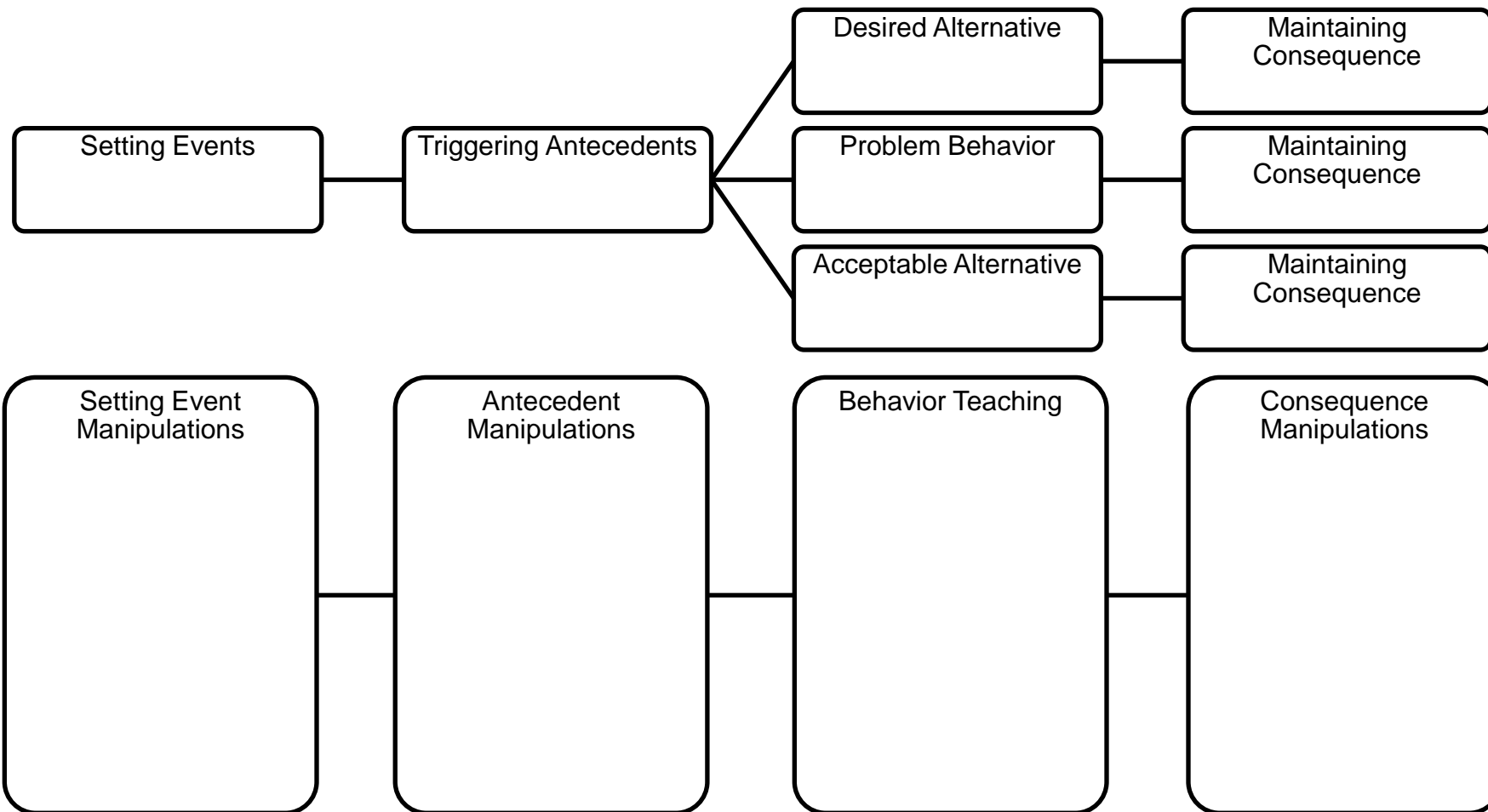
Behavior Management & Teaching

- *A Work in Progress* by Leaf & McEachin
- *Classroom Pivotal Response Teaching for Children with Autism* by Aubyn Stahmer and colleagues
- *Achieving Best Behavior for Children with Developmental Disabilities* by Pamela Lewis
- *1-2-3 Magic* by Thomas Phelan
- *Taking Charge of ADHD* by Russell Barkley
- *It's Time for School!* By Leaf, Taubman & McEachin
- *Teaching Children with Down Syndrome about their Bodies, Boundaries and Sexuality* by Terri Couwenhoven

Social & Communication Behavioral Teaching

- *Crafting Connections* by Taubman, Leaf & McEachin
- *Teaching Social Communication to Children with Autism* by Brooke Ingersoll & Anna Dvortcsak
- *Social Skills and Adaptive Behavior in Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder* by Peter Gerhardt & Daniel Crimmins

Behavioral Supports Flow Chart



KATC & KY Educational Cooperative (2010)

Behavioral Intervention Categories

- **Setting Event Manipulations**

- Modify the distal environment to ensure support of...
 - Basic physical needs (hunger, sleep, pain, etc.)
 - Basic social/emotional and behavioral needs (predictable environment, loving caregivers, etc.)

- **Antecedent-Focused Interventions**

- Modify the immediate environment so that...
 - Problem behaviors are less likely to occur (increase motivation, modify the environment,, etc.)
 - Availability (or unavailability) of reinforcement is signaled (via verbal prompts, visuals, etc.)

- **Behavior/Teaching-Focused Interventions**

- Create pro-active teaching & learning opportunities to improve the needed skill or strengthen an existing alternative behavior
 - Identifying a “positive opposite” and engaging in massed practice to gradually teach it

- **Consequence-Focused Interventions**

- Provide meaningful feedback by increasing contrast between the consequences of behaviors
 - Reinforcement (encouragement) for specific desirable behaviors
 - Absence of reinforcement (ignoring) for specific problem behaviors
 - Punishment (discipline) for specific unignorable problem behaviors

Using Function to Inform Intervention

Attention vs. Tangibles/Activity vs. Escape/Avoid vs. Automatic

Is there an *appropriate* way for the child to access the same type of reinforcement...

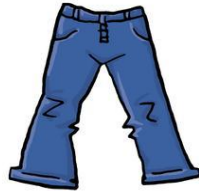
Noncontingently? (regardless of the child's behavior)

Examples: Free access to a toy during class, scheduled breaks, providing attention every 2 minutes

Contingently? (based on the child's behavior)

Examples: Praise and encouragement for following directions, Break earned after 3 work tasks, Computer earned for no aggression during circle time

MORNING ROUTINE



BEDTIME SIMPLE CONTINGENCY



CONTINGENCY MAP

