



Behavior Management Series–Issue #14

Why Children Are Unpopular

Academic Possibilities: Some children are not accepted by their peers because they are either too bright or too “dumb” in the eyes of everyone else. When a child is different academically than other students, this can be a threat to others’ egos. In one sense, the kids do not want to hang out with a really smart student because he may be labeled a “geek” or “nerd”. In the same light, hanging out with students who are “stupid” can be thought of as a reflection on their status.

Environmental Possibilities: Unfortunately, at times, many children and adolescents may be very superficial. They will like someone or dislike someone based on where the person lives. Some children come from poor areas. The school may be located in a rich and poor neighborhood. The children who are poor may not be accepted by the other kids because he does not have the things that the others have.

Intellectual Possibilities: Similar to Academic Possibilities (See above)

Language Possibilities: Some children may not be accepted because they have an accent or do not speak clearly. Their problems with language can create confusion the part of other children with respect to how to act towards them. In a sense, children may ask themselves whether they should be friends with this type of student since they to may become unaccepted by their peers?

Medical Possibilities: Some students may be not be accepted by their peers by virtue of their size or development. A boy may be unaccepted because he is so much smaller than the other kids that he is terrible in sports. A girl may become unaccepted by other girls if she goes through puberty earlier than the other girls. Her recent attention from the boys will create a strong possibility that she will become unaccepted by her female peers.

Perceptual Possibilities: Not applicable.

Psychological Possibilities: Some children are not accepted by their peers because they do not believe in themselves. They have little inner strength for their age and do not enjoy being in the spotlight. Their low confidence and feelings of insecurity do not enable them to stand up and feel comfortable around others. These qualities may become a serious turn off to the other students, thereby leaving the child unaccepted by his peers.

Social Possibilities: There are children who are not involved in any social activities. Because of their lack of involvement with many people, others do not get to know him/her. Based on

their limited contact with other kids other than strictly in the classroom, the child becomes unaccepted by his peers because of his or her anonymity or isolation.

What To Do When This Happens

- Have a conversation with the child alone to discuss why he feels he is not popular with the other children and how he feels about the situation.
- Explain to him the importance of friendship and teach him some coping skills to help him be better friends with the children in his class.
- Have a class lecture on the value of friendship and how we should all treat each other the way we would want to be treated.
- Create a lesson on emotions and feelings stressing the differences in people.
- Assign more learning groups so that children get a chance to interact more with others.
- Reward teamwork within the class.
- Call the parents to discuss the situation to see if the child can become more involved in extra curricular activities.
- Talk to the school psychologist about the possibility of a group within the school to help this child interact with others better.
- If the problem persists to the point where it is affecting the child's everyday functioning, his situation should be brought up to the Child Study Team in the school so that his situation be appropriately evaluated.

Why Children Procrastinate

Academic Possibilities: Children will use procrastination during academic situations in an attempt to delay the possibility of failure, reaction, embarrassment or the reality that they do not know what they are doing.

Environmental Possibilities: Procrastination as a coping mechanism is often seen in families where violence, or other forms of abuse are common. In other homes where this is not the case, children may use procrastination to get back at controlling parents or parents who have higher expectations than the child feels he can satisfy. Procrastination in this case avoids negative reaction, loss of status in the family and the discomfort with the disappointment on the part of the child's parents.

Intellectual Possibilities: Same as Academic Possibilities

Language Possibilities: Same as Academic Possibilities

Medical Possibilities: Not Applicable

Perceptual Possibilities: Some children with perceptual deficits may use procrastination as a means of dealing with situations that they do not fully understand. Instead of saying or doing something, these children do not comprehend all the variables and nuances necessary for appropriate responses. Since these children may often have experience with such confusion in the past, they resort to procrastination to avoid the negative consequences.

Psychological Possibilities: Procrastination may be a form of control over one's environment or others. Holding back may offer some children the only control or power they feel in their lives.

For other children, procrastination is a delay in reality with which they feel unprepared to handle. Other children may use procrastination to avoid a real or perceived negative reaction from some significant individual in their lives.

Social Possibilities: Procrastination may occur as a result of a fear of negative social response, fear of rejection, fear of devaluation or embarrassment. Procrastination provides the child with what they see as a temporary avoidance of these fears. However, procrastination and delay may be different. Procrastination may be ongoing while delay occurs for only a short while and then the individual deals with the situation. What then occurs, is that other children lose their patience for the child who procrastinates further adding to the child's fears.

What To Do When This Happens

Procrastination as a pattern will have adverse effects upon a child's educational success. This pattern should not be allowed to continue once observed. It is imperative that you try to find out the causes of the child's need to procrastinate. Then, refer in this series to the following sections for advice that would also be used with the symptom of procrastination: Lazy, Lack of Interest, and Homework-Incomplete or Failure to Hand In Homework

Why Children Exhibit Risky Behavior

Academic Possibilities: Years of academic failure coupled with parental rejection or disappointment could result in a child turning to risky behavior. At times, hurting oneself is the ultimate anger towards parents.

Environmental Possibilities: Children who come from abusive, chaotic, irrational, violent or questionable parenting styles, may resort to all types of risky behavior patterns. These patterns arise from self doubt, self hatred, depression, feeling trapped, the loss of hope, anger turned inward or the need to embarrass or make their parents sorry.

Intellectual Possibilities: Children with limited intellectual ability may often not be aware of the seriousness of their behavior since they may lack abstract reasoning, mature social skills or cause and effect relationships.

Language Possibilities: Not Applicable

Medical Possibilities: Risky behavior can often be seen in children with severe Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. These children possess impulsive behavior patterns that act before thinking. The impulsivity is so automatic that conscious thought about consequences is often nonexistent.

Perceptual Possibilities: Not Applicable

Psychological Possibilities: Risky behavior is really a cry for help. Children who attempt high risk actions may feel unloved, uncared for, lost, or in desperate need of the belief that someone cares. Risky behavior is a spotlight action in that it brings the spotlight directly to the child. The need for this is so someone will recognize the child's situation and take care of him. However, in many cases, this behavior is often misread, ignored, overreacted to or rationalized as "kids will

be kids.” When this occurs the changes of the child hurting themselves through an increase in the type and frequency of risky behavior increases. In this case the child is not sure what it will take for someone to “hear his cries for help.”

Risky behavior patterns may also be exhibited by some children who are impulsive, difficult, rambunctious and immature and do not understand the consequences of their behavior. These children are often characterized by parents as having behavior problems very early in their development.

Social Possibilities: Risky behavior may be exhibited by certain children as an attempt to gain social recognition, become part of a group that thrives on such behavior, peer pressure or show off behavior for someone of the opposite sex.

What To Do When This Happens

- This is an issue where we strongly recommend that you immediately seek out consultation with the school psychologist and the principal for purposes of the child’s safety, your liability, the school’s liability, and the parent’s rights.

Why Children Are Shy

Academic Possibilities: Poor academic ability may make a child feel inadequate and result in lower levels of self-esteem and verbalizations. This verbal hesitancy may be construed as shyness.

Environmental Possibilities: Children exhibit shyness for a variety of environmental reasons. Children may be shy as a result of overly critical parents or because they live in verbally and/or physically abusive homes. In this case, the shyness is a protection against stirring up problems by saying or doing the “wrong” thing. In other cases, some children are shy as a result of family patterns of shyness and modeling behavior.

Intellectual Possibilities: Intellectual limitations can reduce a child’s confidence in speaking especially if he has received negative responses as a result of their limitations.

Language Possibilities: Certain types of language disorders or articulations problems (i.e. lisps, immature speech patterns) may limit a child’s willingness to communicate for fear of reaction.

Medical Possibilities: Certain types of organic speech disorders can affect a child’s ability or willingness to interact with peers.

Perceptual Possibilities: Certain processing problems (i.e. auditory expressive problems) may interfere in a child’s ability to keep up with conversations or respond in an adequate amount of time. Peer reaction to this may limit the child's willingness to interact.

Psychological Possibilities: Severe anxiety and tension can result in shyness. This is because when a child is so preoccupied dealing with the anxiety and tension, he becomes self-absorbed. This is misperceived by others as shyness. In other cases, the shyness may be the result of depression, and in some extreme cases, the result of selective mutism. Selective mutism is

characterized by a complete refusal to speak in social or school situations despite adequate intelligence and language.

Social Possibilities: Children may be shy as a result of fear of rejection by peers, a lack of confidence in social situations, poor social skills, the fear of being victimized by others or not understanding social rules and requirements.

What To Do When This Happens

- Remember that a shy child is behaving in this manner for some protective reason. Therefore, attempting to force him into a social situation will only create tremendous conflict, anxiety, and tension.
- Meet with the school psychologist to determine whether there are any extenuating circumstances for the shyness (i.e. home issues, trauma, previous academic failure).
- Understand that in order for a shy child to open up, he must feel comfortable in the classroom. At times, this may be like coaxing a frightened turtle out of its shell. If you move too fast, he will revert back inside.
- Confidence is a process that is built over a period of time. The child needs a foundation of successful experiences as well as the appropriate social tools in order to be an active participant in the classroom.
- Meet with child on a one to one basis in a comfortable setting. Explain to the child that you are aware of the difficulty he has in social situations and that you want to help.
- Realize that the child will need practical guidance which must be taught. It is not common sense for many children to know how to act openly in social situations. Confidence builds out from the center like a flower blooming. For instance, have this shy student be involved in small groups and then gradually, if appropriate, increase the size of the group. Initially, pick other students for his group whom you know are more sensitive.
- Have the group work on some simple goal oriented task that will ensure success. This will give the child the feeling of unity and group accomplishment.
- Provide the student with different types of small group activities so that he has the opportunity to work with all the members of his class. For instance, have the child work on a social studies project with one small group of children, and then work on a science project with a different small group.
- Keep in mind that you need to assign these groups and monitor the interactions to ensure protection and success.
- Speak with the school psychologist about having the child join a small group for social skills. These types of controlled groups can help the child learn to interact and build skills in a safe and monitored environment to overcome shyness.

Why Are Some Children Slow Starters

Academic Possibilities: Academic avoidance, fear of failure, a lack of conceptual understanding and so on may all lead to a child being a slow starter. Further, children who have experienced academic lags in learning may also need more time to get started since the concepts do not come easily.

Environmental Possibilities: Children who may have a great deal on their mind as a result of family stress, dysfunction, and so on may not have the available resources to focus and attend to

task. Further, some children who come from parenting styles where a lack of academic motivation is professed may lack desire for schoolwork.

Intellectual Possibilities: Intellectual limited children will have difficulty starting work since grasping ideas, concepts and directions may take longer or become easily confused.

Language Possibilities: Children with language processing difficulties, especially receptive language problems, may exhibit difficulty in starting work since they may not fully understand what is expected.

Medical Possibilities: Some medical conditions or medications may result in low energy levels and hypoactivity.

Perceptual Possibilities: Children with processing difficulties may seem like they are procrastinating, when in fact their processing speed is slow. As a result the child exhibits difficulty starting.

Psychological Possibilities: Intense anxiety and tension can weigh a child down and interfere in his ability to concentrate, become organized and get started.

Social Possibilities: Not Applicable

What To Do When This Happens

- Re-explain the assignment and observe the child until he starts.
- If you are finding this occurring with many students in the class, you may need to reevaluate the assignments for their interest and level of enjoyment.
- Provide more gross motor activities and exercises before academic work to get the child to wake up and get ready to start the school day.
- Sit down with the child until he gets started.
- Make sure that the child is aware of the time limits involved with assignments. Discuss with him the consequences of what will happen if he does not get started and finish his work on time.
- Have a lesson on good work habits.
- Provide some type of incentive for the child if he starts on time and does his work as everyone else does.
- Use gentle prompts throughout the beginning of the day to get the child motivated and so that he knows that you are watching him.
- If the problem persists to the point where it is affecting the child's everyday functioning, his situation should be brought up to the Child Study Team in the school so that his situation be appropriately evaluated.